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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

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Sunday, 25 September 2016, 11 a.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Schwalger	(New Zealand)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

* Reissued for technical reasons

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The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: As the Secretary-General has said, these are indeed chilling days for Syria, and for the people of Aleppo in particular. The past week has been one of the worst ones in Syria during the nearly six years of this devastating conflict. Earlier in the week, I had to deeply regret the fact that the meeting of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) did not yield the results we were hoping for, and actually saw an outcome that put in jeopardy the agreement reached in Geneva by the two co-Chairs on 9 September, which we believed, and want to continue to believe, was meant to reinvigorate the concept and the implementation of the cessation of hostilities.

The ISSG meeting took place in the middle of news that the Government of Syria had declared an offensive in eastern Aleppo — now de facto besieged. It came on the footsteps of two unrelated, but compounding, tragic events. One was the incident in Deir ez-Zor, the second one was the attack on a humanitarian convoy. I can only reiterate the concern expressed by the Secretary-General on the first incident, which was acknowledged as a tragic mistake by the United States, and our shared deep outrage about the deadly attack on the humanitarian convoy. But no incident, irrespective of whether it can be attributed or not, justifies what is taking place before of our own eyes, that is, the unravelling of the cessation of hostilities and the simultaneous unleashing of unprecedented military violence, which is affecting innocent civilians as well.

Let us recall briefly that, following the 9 September announcement of the agreement between the Russian Federation and the United States, which was a complicated agreement that took long time and required long evening and night discussions, the renewed cessation of hostilities that came into effect three days later did indeed reduce violence. Even Aleppo witnessed a reduction in military activities. We heard of families coming out of their shelters and houses to celebrate Eid on the streets. People started to become cautiously optimistic. But there was still sporadic shelling inside the city and some airstrikes in the countryside, but at a lower level.

Then, on 18 September, airstrikes resumed on Aleppo city, when five districts were hit, reportedly by five severe airstrikes. When the Government unilaterally declared the end of the cessation of hostilities on 19 September, we began to hear reports of the use of barrel bombs and airstrikes in eastern Aleppo, where, I want to remind everyone, 275,000 people are currently de facto trapped. Fair enough, there are 1.6 million people on the other side of Aleppo. But they are not isolated, like those in eastern Aleppo. Only minutes after the Government's announcement, our own team in Aleppo clearly heard the sounds of shelling and bombardment begin. They happened to be there because we had sent them to accompany and assist the truck convoy that was possibly meant to leave Turkey in order to get to eastern Aleppo via the Castello Road, .

As the Secretary-General has reported to the Council, on the evening of 19 September as well there was a horrific attack against a humanitarian convoy travelling to Oram Al-Kubra, killing 20 humanitarian Syrian workers and drivers, including the team leader, and destroying 18 out of 31 clearly identified trucks. We condemned that attack in the strongest terms, as did many members around this table, who have offered condolences and have been calling for an inquiry and accountability for those who committed that act.

Since that fateful day, we have seen the situation in eastern Aleppo deteriorate to new heights of horror. Amid intensive airstrikes reported on Friday, following the announcement of the beginning of a Government offensive — an announcement made by the Government itself — the community in opposition-controlled eastern Aleppo even called off their own Friday prayers. Information received by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

indicates dozens of airstrikes on Friday and Saturday, which hit residential buildings across the de facto besieged eastern Aleppo, reportedly causing scores of civilian deaths and injuries, including those of many children.

First responders appear overwhelmed and unable to respond to many of the sites. We have seen reports of three of the four centres operated by the White Helmets in eastern Aleppo being hit. As numbers of casualties are rising, rescue workers struggle to remove people from under the rubble. Even tools that might have been able to mitigate some of the suffering of civilians have reportedly been destroyed in the attacks against the civil defence stations. Information received from sources on the ground suggest the following numbers to date, allegedly due to airstrikes on areas held by armed opposition groups. We cannot verify them, but these are the figures we are seeing at the moment: 213 fatalities in Aleppo province, 139 fatalities in eastern Aleppo and 74 fatalities in rural Aleppo, all including dozens of women and children.

How many airstrikes? Obviously, we have no independent capacity to verify that. Sources on the ground tell us that they no longer have the capacity to count them accurately, given the chaos in Aleppo city and the fact they often take place at night and with remarkable new intensity. We heard the word "unprecedented" used to describe the quantity, scale and type of bombing. We have seen reports, videos and pictures of the reported use of incendiary bombs that create fireballs of such intensity that they light up the pitch darkness in eastern Aleppo, as though it were actually daylight. We now hear of bunker-busting bombs being used, and see pictures of large craters in the ground much larger than in previous aerial bombings. If it is confirmed, the systematic indiscriminate use of such weapons in areas where civilians and civilian infrastructure are present may amount to war crimes. Civilians across town must be asking themselves where on Earth it is now safe to be in that tormented city.

We have also seen reports of armed opposition groups firing hellfire rockets. Do members know what they are? They are basically gas canisters full of nails, stones and iron, which are being launched in a rudimentary way across the other side of the line. These do in fact kill civilians, including one which hit the Al-Maari school in Hamidiya neighbourhood on 22 September. On 19 September, the area close to the United Nations hub in western Aleppo was hit by two mortar shells coming from the opposition, killing one civilian.

There are ongoing reports that medical centres are being targeted, including an alleged strike on an ambulance and medical triage centre in an area held by armed opposition groups in south-western Aleppo, which also caused fatalities among medical staff once again. We hear of streets so filled with rubble — huge piles of rubble — due to these new types of bombs that ambulances cannot even pass through them.

As I mentioned at the beginning, up to 275,000 people in eastern Aleppo — and, frankly, they cannot all be terrorists — have now been under a form of de facto siege for almost 20 days, since the Al-Ramouseh corridor was closed and after the Castello Road was blocked on 7 July. Since that closure, the humanitarian situation has taken a turn for the worse. In essence, supplies are running out. World Food Programme (WFP) stocks inside eastern Aleppo amount to only 12,000 food rations, which means sufficient supplies for 60,000 out of 275,000 people. There is no prospect for replenishing them, since both roads are blocked. Bakeries are being hit and bread is available only for three days a week, which could decrease again in coming days. There is a lack of fuel for general public use, thereby reducing availability for transport services, private wells and household use, especially for cooking.

As the Security Council is aware, the United Nations and WFP had planned to send a convoy to eastern Aleppo at the beginning of the renewed cessation of hostilities. WFP mobilized a convoy of 40 trucks — I have the pictures here — which have been ready and waiting to go every morning at 5 o'clock, loaded with supplies sufficient to provide full food rations for approximately 35,000 people, and wheat flour assistance for an additional 130,000 people of the 275,000. We all know what happened. The convoy never moved because it never received sufficient guarantees — frankly, let us be honest — from either side, and the cessation of hostilities broke down. Complicated arguments were raised by the Government, such as driving licences suddenly becoming crucial in the conflict. On the opposition side, arguments were made asking for all sorts of impossible conditions in order to make sure we would have the guarantees. Obviously, there was hesitation on both sides to see the convoy moving, and we saw the result of that.

Currently, 2 million people have no access to running water through the public network, after intense fighting stopped the flow of water from the two key pumping stations that service the population in both the eastern and western parts of the city. On 22 September, the Bab Al-Nairab water pumping station, which serves the eastern part of the city, was reportedly hit by airstrikes. In retaliation, Jaish Al-Fateh turned off water to 1.5 million people in the western part of the city. There is therefore no water, in a grave tit-for-tat type of move. Luckily, water is now back on more regularly, we hope, after difficult last-minute negotiations led by UNICEF. However, people in eastern Aleppo still remain at risk due to interruptions to safe drinking water. Water from wells, which used to be plentiful, has become highly contaminated due to the conflict. People, particularly vulnerable children, are at risk of catastrophic outbreaks of water-borne diseases. God forbid: that is the last thing we need at a moment like this.

If nothing else, from a humanitarian point of view, we ask the Security Council, first, to press for a cessation of the violence and for the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure; secondly, to press for weekly 48-hour pauses in the fighting to ensure at least that the United Nations and its partners can reach eastern Aleppo, without preconditions from either the Government or, frankly, from the opposition; and, thirdly, to press for medical evacuations. There are several urgent cases in eastern Aleppo at the moment.

Returning to the military situation on the ground, we have seen several accounts of almost every event. There are reports of the Government announcing its intention to retake all of Aleppo city. Shortly after the agreement announced in Geneva by Russia and the United States at almost midnight on 9 September, President Al-Assad visited what was left of Darayya and announced his intention to "liberate every inch of Syria". Furthermore, we saw reports that indicated that the reported objective of Government and pro-Government forces was to "squeeze out terrorists without civilian casualties" and to maintain a corridor for fighters to leave eastern Aleppo. However, what we are seeing is civilians dying in large numbers.

The last few days have seen intense military clashes on major front lines, including Handrat, Sheikh Said, Old Aleppo, Old Ramousa and Hammadiah districts. Yesterday, Government forces said they had taken over Handrat district, north of the city, a claim that armed opposition groups now dispute. Whatever the case, it is a fact that there has been heavy fighting there. There were contradictory statements from the opposition as to whether counter-offensives were being led by the Al-Nusra Front or by Fateh Haleb Operations Room of Free Syrian Army groups. We have seen information from other sources that tells us that more than half of the fighters present in eastern Aleppo are Al-Nusra. We have also seen reports alleging the intentional placement of firing positions close to social infrastructure and inside civilian quarters. We have seen that in other conflicts, but it is not a reason for anyone to destroy the whole building.

The one constant in this violently unpredictable conflict is that neither side will win, and therefore both ultimately will lose. Above all, the Syrian people are going to lose, they are losing their lives day by day. All we can expect in Aleppo if the Syrian Government is intent on retaking it completely — and this is a military analysis done by people far more competent than us — is a slow, grinding, street-by-street fight over the course of months, if not years, whereby the ancient city will be almost completely destroyed. In the face of these illusions of imminent victory, I must reiterate what we now believe to be an almost self-evident truth, but a truth that does not seem to be actually implemented: a so-called military solution or victory in Syria is impossible, including in Aleppo.

Syrians on all sides are still making clear their demand for a ceasefire and a credible political solution. But trust is seriously broken. On 9 September, in Geneva that night, I remember very much both Sergey Lavrov and John Kerry being concerned about it, saying they could not go on making statements that did not have follow-up. But I want to believe — because I am still a naïve United Nations official — that they really meant what they said and that they really negotiated hard, comma by comma, because they wanted it work. But frankly, the international community and the Syrians are swiftly losing any remaining hope, and the international community is losing any credibility with the parties, unless we salvage what was agreed upon. A tiny window of opportunity still exists, and we want to believe that it does, for the Russian Federation and the United States to help the Syrians and the region step away from the brink of more years of a bloody conflict risks becoming even worse.

On Wednesday (see S/PV.7774) I reported to the Security Council that the Secretary-General had asked

me to present to the sides a framework of proposals as a starting point for negotiations in resumed talks, as requested by the ISSG co-Chairs. I am ready to do just that. But the ISSG and the co-Chairs, and the Council itself — and as suggested in an important comment made by the Chinese Foreign Minister at the ISSG meeting on Thursday — the Council has a responsibility to ensure the relaunching of the cessation of hostilities and its implementation without delay, with all the risks and difficulties that entails.

We all know that this conflict cannot be resolved through negotiations without the help and assistance of the co-Chairs and the region. I am therefore asking, indeed urging, both of them to go the extra mile to see if they can save their agreement of 9 September, and do so at the eleventh hour. The agreement not only provides some basis for the resumption of talks, it also provides a broader framework for how to combat terrorism — we have no doubts about that, and I want to believe we all agree on that — and to de-conflict the region more generally, as well as for grounding the Syrian air force, as that too was part of the agreement.

My appeal to the Council today is the following: please, develop a common course of action to enforce a cessation of hostilities in Syria. I am still convinced that we can turn the course of events. We have proved that more than once before. We have come a long way to date to allow the small but tangible achievements of the cessation of hostilities to be buried under the dust of Aleppo's rubble.

I have been repeatedly asked by many,

> "Mr. De Mistura, why do you not resign at this point? Frankly, all this is leading nowhere and this will send a strong signal."

No, I will not, because any sign of my resigning would be a sign that the international community was abandoning the Syrians. The United Nations will never abandon the Syrians, and neither will the Council. We do not need that kind of sign, which would make news for five minutes. And then not only would Syria be abandoned by everyone, but so too the hope that the international community does want to end the conflict.

The President: I thank Mr. De Mistura for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Council.

Ms. Power (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy De Mistura for being here and for his refusal to give up.

We have convened the Security Council today because the Russian Federation and the Al-Assad regime have launched an all-out air and ground offensive against eastern Aleppo and its 275,000 civilians. Russia and Al-Assad have reportedly launched more than 150 airstrikes over the past 72 hours, killing at least 139 people and injuring hundreds more and laying waste to what is left of an iconic Middle Eastern city. These are people who have suffered horribly in the five and a half years of war, yet they call the attacks from the air "unprecedented in quantity and quality." The Al-Assad regime is explicit: it believes only in a military solution. It says it is going to conquer militarily every last square inch of Syria. And it does not care what is left of Syria in pursuing that military solution.

Instead of pursuing peace, Russia and Al-Assad make war. Instead of helping get lifesaving aid to civilians, Russia and Al-Assad are bombing humanitarian convoys, hospitals and first responders, who are trying desperately to keep people alive. Russia will argue today, no doubt, that those attacks are meant to fight terrorism and that the people killed in this offensive are terrorists or terrorist sympathizers. That is absurd. Look at the facts. In the first 24 hours of their assault on eastern Aleppo — an assault, I would note, whose first strikes were carried out in the middle of meetings here in New York in which Russia was saying it wanted to recommit to a cessation of hostilities — Russia and the regime struck not one, not two, but three of the four bases used by the White Helmet volunteers in eastern Aleppo.

The White Helmets are first responders who bravely rush to the scene of bombings to dig through the rubble for survivors. Every day, they save lives by driving ambulances and fire trucks and, where there are no roads left, running on foot to the homes, schools, hospitals and markets that Russia and Al-Assad have attacked. The White Helmets continue to do that even though they know that the regime routinely carries out now-infamous double-tap airstrikes — in which they strike a target, wait for first responders to arrive and then strike again. A month ago, the world was shocked by the dazed stare of 5-year-old Omran Daqneesh as he sat in the back of an ambulance after his home was bombed. He was rescued by White Helmets. But because of Russia and Al-Assad's attacks these past few days,

fewer kids like Omran are going to be rescued. Those buried alive in rubble in eastern Aleppo are much more likely to die in rubble.

Another target that the latest Russia/Al-Assad offensive struck at its outset was the Bab Al-Nairab pumping station, as we have heard, which supplies drinking water to the people in eastern Aleppo. As a result, two months after the Al-Assad regime cut off eastern Aleppo from deliveries of food, medicine and humanitarian aid, residents will now be at risk of disease and infection as they drink whatever dirty, untreated water they can find. I would note that an opposition group also turned off a nearby pumping station that supplies water to some of the more than 1.5 million people in western Aleppo, which we condemn. Water should never be used as a weapon of war, and Aleppo's residents should not be forced to drink water that makes them sick, wherever they live. This is obscene.

Eastern Aleppo remains under siege as we convene here today. It seems the only items making it into eastern Aleppo these days are barrel bombs and incendiaries, which witnesses report seeing dropped by Al-Assad's forces and Russian forces. The combined impact on civilians of relentless airstrikes and blockades is crushing. Fuel for diesel generators, the main source of electricity, is running out. Within a week, there may not be enough power to keep producing bread. Hospitals, which have already relocated emergency rooms to basements and bunkers in an attempt to protect their patients from routine airstrikes, can barely keep the lights on. Because the electricity is so often knocked out, doctors have learned to conduct operations by the light of their cell phones. Yet each new airstrike brings them more and more maimed civilians, who they are forced to treat with fewer and fewer supplies.

Look at the photos that people in eastern Aleppo posted online in the past two days: Syrians slumped in blood-spattered hallways; men, women and children covered in rags and lying in pools of blood in makeshift hospitals; unconscious babies who need someone to pump oxygen into their lungs manually when generators fail. And if those victims need specialist treatment, they cannot get it. Even worse, they cannot leave eastern Aleppo. They are trapped — savagely, medievally. The United Nations assembled a convoy of trucks to deliver aid to eastern Aleppo more than a week ago, but it remains blocked by the fighting, unable to drive into that inferno.

Russia, of course, has long had the power to stop this suffering. The United States worked with Russia for eight painstaking months to develop an arrangement that included a renewed commitment to the cessation of hostilities. Just last week, the United States sponsored two ministerial meetings of the International Syria Support Group aimed at halting the violence and returning to a cessation of hostilities. We did so not because we think Russia has acted in good faith in Syria; we know as well as anyone that Russia has consistently said one thing and done the opposite. We did so because we know that there can be no peace in Syria if Russia is determined to keep fighting this war. We believe that we must do everything in our power to find a way to halt the violence and get on the path to a political transition, which is the only way to end this conflict. That is why, even now, we will continue to look for any way possible to restore the cessation of hostilities.

But it is common sense: a one-sided cessation of hostilities cannot hold. You cannot carry out a massive military offensive and say you are for peace. That might work on Russia Today, but it does not work when the world has reams of evidence proving exactly what Russia is doing. Last Wednesday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov sat in this Chamber and declared that, when it comes to Syria,

> "Russia has consistently advocated an exclusively peaceful solution." (*S/PV.7774, p. 6*)

Yet given when the offensive began, it is not unreasonable to think that Russian and Syrian forces were literally loading the incendiary munitions and barrel bombs onto their aircraft as Minister Lavrov spoke here of making peace. The next day, after Russia and the regime began to rain its bombs down on civilians in eastern Aleppo, Minister Lavrov told the press that plans for a cessation of hostilities must be saved. This is Russia's approach to saving the cessation of hostilities? As the United Nations has said repeatedly, including today, these airstrikes on residential neighborhoods may well be war crimes.

Russia today will no doubt again accuse the United States of causing all of this chaos. They might point to the single airstrike in which the counter-Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant coalition appears to have struck a Syrian military position — a strike that we immediately acknowledged and committed to investigating in full. Russia will likely try to divert from its own actions by

invoking United States actions elsewhere in the past. What members can be sure that Russia will not do today, or any day, is accept any responsibility for its actions. What members can be sure that Russia will not do is tell the truth.

I urge my fellow members of the Security Council to look at the remarks that they have brought today and to ask themselves, "Does what I am about to read reflect the gruesome facts on the ground? Does it speak candidly to who is unleashing this appalling violence? Would I feel comfortable reading these remarks to a Chamber packed with the residents of eastern Aleppo being besieged by Al-Assad's forces and by Russia?" If not, I urge them to speak directly to Syria's grim reality and the people who must live with it day in and day out.

This is not the day or the time to blame all sides or to draw false equivalencies. It is not the time to use the passive voice that is so common here in the Security Council. It is not the time to say that "airstrikes took place" or that "civilians were killed". It is time to say who is carrying out those airstrikes and who is killing civilians.

Russia holds a permanent seat on the Security Council. That is a privilege and it is a responsibility. Yet in Syria and in Aleppo, Russia is abusing this historic privilege. And while members of the Council — certainly including the United States — have a deep interest in having constructive ties with the Russian Federation, history will not look kindly on those Council members who stay silent in the face of this carnage.

Russia would have the Council live in upside-down land, where bombing first responders, cutting off humanitarian aid and supporting a murderous regime is billed as counter-terrorism. Let us be clear. There are terrorists in Syria — lots of them —and all of us have an interest in destroying them. They pose a threat to all of our citizens. That is why the United States leads a 67-country coalition that has rolled back 40 per cent of ISIL's territorial holdings in Iraq and Syria, and which each week liberates more desperate civilians. That is why the United States negotiated the recent agreement with Russia, signaling that we were prepared to work with Russia to fight Jabhat Al-Nusra and ISIL in Syria. Nobody has to convince the United States of America of the danger posed by terrorists. Our citizens are often priority targets all around the world. But when Russia is espousing fiction, we have to call that out. What Russia is sponsoring and doing is not counter-terrorism; it is barbarism.

Let me conclude. On Friday, footage emerged of the aftermath of one of the many recent airstrikes in eastern Aleppo. In the video, first responders dig through the rubble of what was once a building, throwing aside chunks of concrete, and then suddenly one hears on the video the piercing scream of a child — a child literally submerged in concrete and rubble. The first responders then begin to dig more frantically, until the head and blue and white shirt of the little girl emerges — a girl crying out in pain and in terror. Eventually, tenderly, the first responders remove the rubble from around her and pull that girl – five-year-old Rawan Alowsh – from the wreckage, her body covered in white dust. It feels like a miracle, watching her come out alive.

And yet, everyone else in Rawan's immediate family was reportedly killed in that airstrike: her mother, her father and her four siblings, all killed. What chance does Rawan have in this world? What chance does she have with no family, but also with not even a single sign that her attackers have a shred of empathy in them? When violent attacks against civilians are surging; when norms of civilized behaviour that we have spent more than 70 years trying to build are being trampled; when there is complete impunity for targeting aid convoys, civilian, residential neighbourhoods, children and hospitals — impunity — what chance does Rawan or any of us have?

One first responder said of the relentless assault of the last few days: "People do not know what to do or where to go. There is no escape. It feels like the end of the world." The end of the world. It is apocalyptic, what is being done to eastern Aleppo. Surely, for Rawan — who at five years old has lost her entire family — the Council can at the very least have the courage to say who is responsible for this and, in a single voice, tell Russia to stop.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France, alongside the United States and the United Kingdom, asked for this emergency meeting to be convened because the information we have received from Aleppo marks a new height in the military escalation and a further descent into the abyss that characterize the tragedy in Syria. This information, corroborated by the statement made just now by Special Envoy of the Secretary-General Staffan de Mistura — whom, on behalf of France, I thank for his involvement — attests

to a level of violence that has certainly never been attained in five years of a conflict that, I recall, is the greatest humanitarian tragedy since the Second World War.

Folllowing the unspeakable attack on a humanitarian convoy last Monday, on Thursday the regime — with the support of its backers — launched a major air offensive the clear objective of which is to bring Aleppo to its knees as soon as possible. The streets of Aleppo are no longer anything but a heap of ruins. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, hundreds of victims — including many children — have have been massacred in three days by the regime's bombs. As we speak, 275,000 civilians remain prisoners in the city and live in terror of indiscriminate bombing by the Syrian regime and its active supporters.

We are horrified by this new military gambit of the Syrian regime, which has persisted for months in trying to take Aleppo with the help of its supporters. Under the guise of fighting terrorism, the regime indiscriminately bombs homes, maternity clinics, hospitals, schools, refugee camps and neighbourhoods held by the moderate opposition. While the international community has sought for months to secure a truce, the Al-Assad regime has tirelessly violated international humanitarian law, the resolutions of the Security Council and the most basic principles of humanity.

In many ways, Aleppo is to Syria what Sarajevo was to Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Guernica to the Spanish Civil War — a symbolic city, a crossroads city, a martyred city. Aleppo, a symbolic city several thousand years old that has been declared a World Heritage site; a crossroads city, where so many countless cultures have met and mingled, has today become a martyred city. That symbol of civilization is under a siege that can only be called medieval. This is retrogressive and, frankly, shameful.

The information at our disposal indicates the systematic use of a new type of incendiary weapon and high-tech ammunition and subammunition that puncture bunkers and cause the collapse of an entire building in one impact. The use of such weapons against civilians should not surprise us, unfortunately, in the hands of a regime that has for many years bombarded its population with chlorine gas, phosphorus and explosive barrels. As the Secretary-General recalled yesterday, the indiscriminate and systematic use of such weapons in residential neighbourhoods constitutes a war crime — yes, a war crime — nd such a crime cannot go unpunished.

If we do nothing to prevent the total destruction of Aleppo, this week will be recalled as the moment when diplomacy failed and barbarity and brutality triumphed. The Council and the International Syria Support Group have met this week to seek an agreement on the cessation of hostilities and immediate and unhindered access to humanitarian aid. These discussions have not, for now, been unsuccessful. The military escalation now under way threatens the fragile hope for a truce in which we could still believe only a week ago. Russia imagines that it can restore the trust of its partners by negotiating a cessation of hostilities with one hand while supporting the regime that is bombarding Aleppo with the other.

Today, saving Aleppo must be our priority. A few weeks ago, Russia and the United States were able to agree to an operational plan for establishing a cessation of hostilities and ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid. France supported the agreement, as it had supported all Vienna process initiatives to alleviate the suffering of civilians. The immediate implementation of that agreement, beginning with Aleppo, is our only hope and must therefore be our priority. France also calls for the establishment of a robust mechanism to monitor the cessation of hostilitiess, which alone can restore the necessary confidence and ensure the consolidation of the truce, first in Aleppo and then throughout the country. Through its Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault, my country has made detailed proposals to that end.

If there is one zone where the cessation of hostilities must be implemented on a priority basis, it is Aleppo. If there is one zone that the regime's aircraft must immediately be forbidden to overfly, it is Aleppo. If there is one zone where the people are urgently in need of emergency humanitarian assistance, it is Aleppo.

The Security Council is today at a moment of truth. It must rise to the immense responsibility that is incumbent upon it, and thus upon each of its members and all of us. We expect Russia in particular to give proof of its genuine readiness to stop supporting the military option and to truly seek a negotiated solution to the Syrian conflict with all the means and leverage at its disposal. If we wish to end the tragedy in Aleppo and Syria, we must ultimately put all our cards on the table, call things by their rightful names, and find a way

to unite around a collective approach. That is the only possible option, howsoever difficult it may be, to break the current deadlock and restore the political dynamic that is the only way to stop the Syrian conflict.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this emergency meeting today at the request of the United Kingdom, the United States and France. I join others in thanking Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his briefing and for his relentless stamina.

The Al-Assad regime and Russia are reducing Aleppo to rubble. Aleppo's inhabitants are ordinary Syrians who have suffered so much for so long. They are now facing an unprecedented, unrelenting onslaught of cruelty, and it is increasingly clear that it is an onslaught beyond the capabilities of the Syrian air force alone. After five years of conflict, one might think that the regime has had its fill of barbarity and that its sick blood lust against its own people has finally run its course.

But this weekend, the regime and Russia have instead plunged to new depths and unleashed a new hell on Aleppo. Bunker-busting bombs, more suited to destroying military installations, are now destroying homes, decimating bomb shelters, and crippling, maiming and killing dozens, if not hundreds. Incendiary munitions, indiscriminate in their reach, are being dropped onto civilian areas so that, yet again, Aleppo is burning. And to cap it all, water supplies so vital to millions are now being targeted, depriving water to those most in need. In short, it is difficult to deny that Russia is partnering with the Syrian regime to carry out war crimes.

Yet only four days ago (see S/PV.7774), we heard Foreign Minister Lavrov speak right here of Russia's commitment to a political, peaceful solution, and of Russia's commitment to the cessation of hostilities. Today, that commitment resembles much of Syria — broken and lifeless. The true meaning of that commitment can be seen on the ashen faces of the victims of Aleppo; on the faces of a mother clutching her child, crushed beneath the rubble; on the faces of the White Helmets and medics, injured or killed as they try desperately to save lives; and on the faces of every single man, woman and child who still calls Aleppo home. As the Secretary-General has said, these are dark days for the protection of civilians.

These devastating events underscore what we have known for so long. Russia needs to be salvaging, not stymieing efforts to restore the cessation of hostilities. Russia needs to be enabling, not attacking unfettered humanitarian assistance. And ultimately, Russia should be creating, not destroying the conditions necessary for the resumption of political talks. If it does not take these steps and more, Russia will only confirm its status as an international pariah. But in truth, as the horrific, unconscionable attack on the humanitarian convoy last week painfully illustrated, Russia simply has no credibility left on these issues.

Now Russia will no doubt try to deflect attention away from the crimes it is committing in Syria by blaming the opposition and talking a great deal about the threat from terrorism. Everyone in this Chamber agrees that Da'esh and Al-Nusra are terrorists and must be defeated. That is not the question. But Russia and the regime are not bombing terrorists; they are bombing all forms of opposition and killing hundreds every month. They collaborate with sectarian Shia militias and with Hizbullah — a terrorist organisation in the eyes of many members of the Council and the Arab League — to inflict their own terror on Syria's civilian population.

Let us not forget that Al-Assad's regime, supported by Russia, has killed far more civilians in Syria than Da'esh and Al-Nusra put together. So every time we rightly condemn Da'esh and Al-Nusra terrorism in Syria, let us also condemn the absolute terror being inflicted on the Syrian people by the Al-Assad regime and by Russia as they continue to bomb Syrian civilians day and night. Because the Syrian people will never forget the death and destruction that the sectarian Al-Assad regime has unleashed upon them, nor will they forget that Russia aided and abetted that ruthless sectarian dictator in waging war against his own people. They also will not forget that the international community, and the Security Council in particular, failed to stop the bombing, failed to stop the chlorine and failed to stop the starvation.

So let us be clear. It is Russia's actions in Syria and in the Council that have caused that failure; it is Russia's actions that have prolonged the conflict and prolonged the suffering. It is Russia's four vetoes in the past five years that have prevented Council unity and brought shame on us all, and brought its diplomacy into disrepute.

So the Council must now do more than demand or urge; we must now decide. What can we do to enforce an immediate end to the bombardment of Aleppo and other civilian areas in Syria? We must decide what we can do now to end the sieges and the chokehold that is preventing aid getting in. And in doing so, we must speak loudly and clearly that there will be accountability for these crimes and so many more, including the barbaric, despicable use of chemical weapons by the regime against its own people. That is the only way to stop the suffering, and it is the only way for Russia to atone for its deplorable actions in Syria.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): This is the sixth year that the Syrian people have endured a terrible tragedy. In 2011, in Washington, D.C., and various other Western capitals, the decision was made to continue reshaping the geopolitics of the Middle East and North Africa, a process that had started with the criminal invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the United States and the United Kingdom. They continued to swing an axe in both Libya and Syria and did not shrink from accepting support from terrorist groups. The inevitable consequences — the disintegration of both countries and the creation of millions of refugees — were written off as an unforeseen nuisance.

The result is that hundreds of armed groups are active in Syria, the country is being bombed by anyone who feels like it and restoring peace has become almost impossible. Months of work by Russian and United States experts under the direction of Russia's Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State of the United States, along with the involvement of the Presidents of both countries, resulted in a detailed plan, set out in documents finalized on 9 September, which if carried out in good faith could have enabled us to calm the situation on the ground, significantly improve the humanitarian situation and kick-start a resumption of intra-Syrian negotiations under United Nations auspices. Thanks to sabotage on the part of an intractable opposition, the plan's implementation was endlessly delayed. Our agreements had a lot of opponents and, sadly, we have begun to feel that their unconstructive position has outweighed the desire for peace and common sense.

The United States has in fact admitted its inability to exert any influence over the groups under its patronage, and thus to genuinely fulfil our agreements, which above all entail distinguishing the moderate groups from the terrorists and truly effect such a separation on the ground. That was written down in black and white in all the documents. But nothing has been done. Even the issue of defining terrorist groups has produced nothing but wondering, suggesting that the main aim continues to be protecting the military capacity of the opponents of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, whoever they may be. Unscrupulous methods and exceedingly dubious allies have been useful in that regard.

New conditions and ultimatums that change with dizzying speed are constantly being issued. Requests for a ceasefire, sometimes for 48 hours, sometimes for 72, are constant. We have always met them halfway, or at least tried to, and reached agreement with the Syrian Government. But in the end what has happened is that the militants have regrouped, received reinforcements and launched new offensives. After that came the demand that a precondition was that the Syrian Government should unilaterally halt its air-force flights. First they said it would be for three days, and we agreed to that. Then they said no, that the President of the United States had changed his mind and it had to be seven days, although it was not clear why. Such tactical tricks cannot go on forever. We are not going to agree to any unilateral steps any more.

The bombardment by the so-called coalition forces, reported in this case to be British aircraft, of the Syrian army positions defending the Syrian city of Deir ez-Zor from the terrorists of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, was a serious blow to the agreements. There was a real danger that the terrorists would capture the city, leading inevitably to the slaughter of civilians. Fortunately, the Syrian armed forces, assisted by the Russian air force, succeeding in averting that potential tragedy. Needless to say, that also created a threat to the ceasefire, but Damascus displayed enviable restraint in that regard.

Since my colleagues — understandably — have talked about the situation in which a humanitarian convoy was shelled, I naturally have something to say about it, too. There are two aspects to this.

First, I would like to note that here in New York we first heard about it from the United States Secretary of State, who said, in a private conversation, that they had received intelligence that, for a few minutes, two Russian aircraft had been somewhere not far from the area where the humanitarian convoy had been travelling and where it was attacked. But he said that

we should not worry and that they were not going to make the information public, since it had to be further investigated. As usual, however, there were leaks from various Washington agencies a few minutes later, and the following day the Secretary of State made the tragedy a centrepiece of his dramatic statement in the Security Council (see S/PV.7774). That is the kind of way we have to work with our American colleagues.

Secondly, we said from the very beginning that everything should be investigated. This was because at first there were reports of artillery shelling, but after that there was talk of helicopters and, later, aircraft. I am not a military expert, but today I read somewhere that the bombing allegedly lasted seven hours. But if the Russian planes were somewhere in the area for a few minutes, could bombs have been falling on the convoy for seven hours? I do not think so. We should therefore investigate that. By the way, our Western counterparts promised to inform us two months ago about their investigation of the bombardment of the Syrian city of Manbij, in which it was reported that more than 100 civilians had been killed, apparently by French aircraft. But neither our French colleagues nor the American coalition leaders have been in a hurry to tell us about the conclusions of that investigation, which they promised to conduct two months ago.

I now return to Aleppo. The humanitarian situation there could have been normalized as long ago as August. But we were prevented in this by the armed groups, which, with the implicit sanction of their outside sponsors, continued to dictate the operational conditions and fire on the humanitarian corridors. We were close to a breakthrough even in September. The Government withdrew its forces to the agreed-on distances and the authorities set up one of the checkpoints stipulated in the 9 September agreement, with the participation of Syrian Arab Red Crescent personnel, and gave permission for the humanitarian convoy to go through. And once again there ensued militant provocations.

I would just like to explain the situation in eastern Aleppo in a bit more detail. The area is under the control of more than 20 armed groups totalling about 3,500 combatants. The main force consists of about 2,000 units of Jabhat Al-Nusra. They are armed with tanks, armoured vehicles, field artillery and rocket launcher systems, not to mention the homemade so-called hell cannons used to shoot gas cylinders, as well as dozens and dozens of other pieces of military hardware, including heavy weaponry. Needless to say, such hardware is anything but homemade; I believe it continues to be supplied by generous Western patrons with the connivance of the United States leadership of the coalition. That reminds me of an episode to do with Libya, when a question was posed at the congressional hearings held at the end of 2013, at which the United States Secretary of State was present, asking for information about the fact that it was known that some countries had supplied 20,000 tons of arms to Libya, while the United States looked the other way. No doubt the State Department was forced to give Congress that information. We asked for it to be shared with us as well, but we have received nothing, despite the fact that the United States is obliged to do so in order to comply with Security Council resolutions on Libya.

I suggest that the scope of military support to the motley crew in Syria is significantly bigger than it was in Libya. The Government forces' positions and the city's residential areas are being shelled daily and indiscriminately from the eastern districts of Aleppo, with no adjustments or aiming and with a view to inflicting maximum damage. Since 1 September, the shelling from the eastern part of the city has resulted in the deaths of more than 50 troops and 120 civilians. Jabhat Al-Nusra specializes in situating weapon positions in areas where there is significant social infrastructure — pumping stations, power substations, hospitals, schools, mosques — and in densely populated urban areas, thereby turning civilians into human shields for terrorists.

Jabhat Al-Nusra's primary attacks take place to the north, across the Castello Road, and the south-west, through the Ramousa district, with the aim of breaching the Government's defences and creating a corridor for the passage of reserves, weapons and ammunition, often in the guise of humanitarian aid. By the way, our American colleagues told us long ago that Al-Nusra was not present in Aleppo but only somewhere in the South. Eventually they admitted that it also had a presence in the North, but that they were going to let us know what the situation was there. Al-Nusra is in fact the main military force there. According to the information we have, more than 80 per cent of the population in the city's eastern districts supports lifting the siege through peaceful negotiations and is asking the terrorists to leave the city. Some of the volunteer opposition militias in Aleppo have been trying to find an opportunity to

negotiate with the Government, but Jabhat Al-Nusra has been firmly suppressing such sentiments.

Since 1 September, seven mass executions have been recorded of those who supported negotiations or tried to leave the city. On 19 September, 26 men and teenagers who had refused to take up arms in support of Al-Nusra were shot dead in front of residents of the Sheikh Hader neighbourhood. We have seen mass exoduses along the seven humanitarian corridors created by Russia and the Syrian Government, which speak to the savage reprisals that have been made against civilians. As they leave, the civilians receive humanitarian aid. More than 4,000 civilians and about 300 fighters have left Aleppo's eastern districts along the corridors since the operation began.

The armed groups have blocked humanitarian access to the city. Since 12 September, Russia, Syria and the United Nations have been trying to ensure the passage of humanitarian convoys to the eastern part of Aleppo using the Castello Road, and measures have been taken to demilitarize it in order to achieve that. The forces along it have been withdrawn twice, on 14 and 16 September. On 17 September, Syrian Red Crescent personnel installed a checkpoint on its western side. The opposition has refused to take the same measures on their side, as stipulated in the Russian-American agreements of 9 September. The illegal Fateh Haleb armed group coalition, the local Aleppo council and the provisional opposition Government have all declared that they would not let aid into the city via the Castello Road, and militants have threatened to attack the convoys. As a result, the humanitarian operation in Aleppo that Russia and the United Nations prepared at the end of August has been wrecked. The militants confiscate food, water and medicines from civilians and force them to work on building defences.

There have been riots in the neighbourhoods of Avvad, Al-Ansari and Sahur, and protests have been brutally suppressed by terrorists using arms. Similarly, more than 200,000 Aleppo residents have been taken hostage by terrorists from Jabhat Al-Nusra and groups affiliated with it, in attempts to use women and children as human shields.

Government forces are protecting the Castello and Ramousa Roads, and those surrounding them, which are strategically important to the city as supply routes. They fire only in response to terrorist attacks and at known and verified targets. They are also combating Al-Nusra's intense efforts to penetrate the city from the south-west and north. In order to try to break through, the terrorists have made active use of suicide bombers in mined cars and armoured troop carriers. More than 40 such attacks have been recorded in Aleppo since 1 August.

Aircraft have been used against militant targets and groups only with the use of air gunners and target illumination. The main objective is to force the terrorists out of the city with a minimum of civilian casualties. The militants are being offered negotiations, and a special northern corridor to the Castello Road has been set up for those exiting with arms. The Russian-American agreements of 9 September provide for a mechanism guaranteeing safe exit for combatants monitored by the United Nations. All those who want amnesty are offered a simplified process for regulation of their status. There are officials from the Russian reconciliation centre in the humanitarian corridor areas whose job it is to monitor the situation and prevent inhumane treatment of militants. Civilians are offered all possible means for leaving the city and getting away from the armed groups, but the terrorists obstruct this.

We are seeing attempts to launch a media campaign to discredit the measures the Government is taking to force out terrorists, using faked or old video, some of it made in western Aleppo. The scale of the operations is exaggerated and the shelling is filmed in the city's abandoned south-western districts, where hostilities have been fierce for more than a month, and made out to be indiscriminate strikes against peaceful parts of eastern Aleppo.

I will now turn to the political process and address myself to Mr. Staffan de Mistura as well as, obviously, to Council members. The political process must be resumed. Frankly, we do not understand why there has been no decisive action in that regard since May. In that regard, I would like to recall that paragraph 9 of the first statement of the International Syria Support Group provided that

> "[t]he participants together with the United Nations will explore modalities for, and implementation of, a nationwide ceasefire to be initiated on a date certain and in parallel with this renewed political process."

What that means is that continuing the political process is a fundamental condition that would have

helped to ensure that the ceasefire was established and complied with.

I would like to ask Mr. De Mistura who it is who has been refusing to engage in direct talks all this time? We know the answer, but I would like to hear it from his lips. Perhaps it is time to stop dancing around the irresponsible politicians who pretend to represent the interests of the Syrian people. If they do not want to conduct negotiations, let them go back to the foreign capitals where they have found a haven. We should bring forward those representatives of the Syrian opposition who really want to lead their country out of the crisis, and we know they exist.

And of course there is the ceasefire. We would like it to remain our goal, along with the resumption of negotiations. I want to stress once again that we can talk about restoring the ceasefire only on the basis of a collective approach, one in which it is not we who have to unilaterally prove anything to anyone but rather up to others to convince us of their sincere desire to dissociate the opposition cooperating with the American-led coalition from Jabhat Al-Nusra. After that, Jabhat Al-Nusra must be beaten and the opposition made part of the political process. If they fail to convince us, that will only increase our suspicions that all this was done to take the heat off Jabhat Al-Nusra. The only way out, therefore, is through honest, joint work to enable every side to implement the ceasefire agreements rather than pushing unilateral demands about whom to offer gestures of goodwill in the hope of profiting from it down the road.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing.

The clashes in the areas of Syria under discussion have recently escalated, resulting in heavy civilian casualties, and a United Nations humanitarian assistance convoy has been attacked. China is very concerned about this. We regret the fact that Syrian Government forces were hit by an airstrike and suffered casualties, and hope that all the parties concerned will improve their coordination and prevent such incidents from happening again.

The Syrian conflict has persisted for more than five years now. China is deeply sympathetic to the suffering of the Syrian people and believes that the situation cannot be allowed to continue. Right now, the priority is for all parties in Syria to work to effectively implement the Security Council resolutions on the Syrian issue. The international community should pursue all four tracks of a ceasefire, political negotiations, humanitarian aid and cooperation against terrorism, in order to facilitate the finding of a solution to the question of Syria.

China hopes that the agreement reached between the Russian Federation and the United States regarding the cessation of hostilities among all Syrian parties will be successfully implemented so as to create opportunities to improve the situation on the ground. The international community should work in collaboration to urge all parties in Syria to effectively implement the agreement in order to resume the ceasefire as soon as possible.

The more complex the situation in Syria, the more important it is to uphold the general direction of political settlement, give full play to the United Nations in its role as the main channel of mediation, continue to support the efforts of Special Envoy De Mistura, relaunch the Geneva talks as soon as possible, and press ahead on a Syrian-owned and -led political process so as to achieve arrangements that accommodate all interests. Countries of the region should play a positive role in promoting a political settlement in Syria.

The humanitarian situation in Syria is becoming more and more precarious with each passing day. All parties in Syria must provide full humanitarian access and ensure that humanitarian supplies can be delivered in a timely and safe manner. The international community should continue to scale up its humanitarian assistance to Syria so as to alleviate the humanitarian situation on the ground, provide assistance to neighbouring countries and help them in hosting refugees.

Counter-terrorism is a very important component of any solution to the situation in Syria. The Syrian conflict has led to the rise and spread of terrorism. Unless we root it out, there will be no peace for the Syrian people and no security for regional countries. The international community should work with resolve to combat all terrorist forces listed by the Security Council, including the Islamic State. In the process of international counter-terrorism cooperation, we must enhance intelligence-sharing, prevent and stop social media from spreading extremist ideology, and cut off the flow of terrorists and their channels of financing.

China has made unremitting efforts to promote a political settlement in Syria, and stepped up its efforts to urge all parties to end the conflict as soon as possible and achieve a comprehensive political solution. China

stands ready to play a constructive role in promoting a full, just and appropriate settlement in Syria.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has always maintained that the search for a peaceful and negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria must be based on respect for the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of the country, bearing in mind the legitimate Government as a key figure in the process. In the midst of this bloody and prolonged conflict, the cessation of hostilities agreement announced on 9 September by the co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group was welcomed positively, yet cautiously, with a view to paving the way for greater understanding in pursuit of peace and stability in Syria.

Unfortunately, it must be said that the United States-led coalition against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant took military action last weekend against the Syrian army, jeopardizing the cessation of hostilities agreed to a few days earlier. Venezuela condemns and laments the inexplicable attack on positions of the Syrian Arab Army carried out by American, British and Australian aircraft, manned by the aforementioned coalition, on 17 September. The attack was followed by a ground offensive launched by Da'esh in an effort to make headway on the ground. At the high-level meeting on Syria on Wednesday, 21 September (see S/PV.7774), United States Secretary of State, John Kerry said the attack was a mistake. We have to say that it seriously undermined the cessation of hostilities and the fragile trust between the parties. This is especially grave in the light of the fact that, as we all know, the city of Deir ez-Zor and its 250,000 inhabitants is besieged by Da'esh and is being defended only by a Syrian military contingent.

This unfortunate attack was immediately followed by another attack against humanitarian aid convoys heading to the city of Aleppo, resulting in the deaths of humanitarian workers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. This was an appalling act against humanitarian staff who, in the adverse conditions of war, carry out the noble duty of providing aid to civilians in need of humanitarian assistance. We reiterate that such people cannot be viewed as military targets, which is why all attacks directed towards them have international criminal consequences. Furthermore, we hope that premature conclusions will not be drawn regarding the perpetrators of this attack, and that the facts will undergo a thorough investigation.

Without a doubt, these two regrettable events have sparked an escalation in the conflict and led to attacks on both sides. Added to all of this is suffering, which is what matters most in a country whose entire institutional framework has been severely impacted by the war waged on it by terrorists and their alliances, who refuse to accept self-evident truths. Any decision about the fate of Syria and its Government belongs solely and exclusively to the Syrian people, since the solution to the conflict and its differences can be reached only through political dialogue and negotiation. That is why armed confrontation and foreign intervention are doomed to failure and only damage the prospects for peace and stability in the region. That was tragically manifest in the horrific events in Libya and Iraq, brother countries left forlorn and blood-stained by military interventions and interference of foreign Governments.

Given that the main enemy in the region and country is terrorism, a genuine commitment to peace requires that the moderate opposition end its relationship of convenience with Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and the recently created Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. The latter seeks to disguise its terrorist acts by aligning itself with moderate opposition groups so as to continue receiving the political and military support of other countries. However, the abdominal images of the atrocities committed by these so-called moderate opposition groups against the civilian population of Aleppo — such as is the beheading of a 12-year-old Palestinian boy among the sadism, laughter and mockery of the combatants of the so-proclaimed moderate opposition — are still fresh in our memory.

Our country shares the widespread concern over the humanitarian situation in Syria. It is a catastrophe. There have been major violations of international law and in the protection of civilians in Aleppo. We are alarmed by the loss of human life and that the situation on the ground may threaten the progress achieved since the cessation of hostilities. However, we believe that convening this emergency meeting only to turn it into political propaganda against the Russian Federation and the Syrian Government contributes in no way to restoring trust among the parties or to alleviating the humanitarian situation, much less to supporting efforts on the ground to resume negotiations and the a potential ceasefire.

We believe that the Security Council must shoulder its enormous responsibilities in this conflict in terms of maintaining international security and peace. Furthermore, regardless of the differences among its members or their own national positions, the Council must support the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, in his efforts to resume political negotiations and pursue a path towards peace that includes the legitimate Government of President Bashar Al-Assad throughout the entire long and complex process.

Lastly, we must not give up. The Syrian people have hope for and trust in the United Nations to move forward in restoring peace to their long-suffering country.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We meet again today to make our statements and stress our various positions on the Syrian crisis, which has lasted for over five years. Regrettably, this meeting is being held against the backdrop of continued differences between regional and international Powers with influence on the ground, which have thus far failed to realize that the only party bearing the brunt of this crisis is the Syrian people, particularly Syrian mothers who have had to choose between letting their children face great danger on the high seas rather or having them stay with them at home.

We have held several meetings in New York in the past few days on the crisis in Syria, both in the Security Council and in the International Syria Support Group (ISSG). All have agreed on two major points: first and foremost, that we all recognize that the war in Syria is a proxy war and that stopping the bloodshed is up to the forces taking part in military operations, whether directly or indirectly; and, secondly, that the implementation of the recent agreement between Russia and the United States on a cessation of hostilities is the only available opportunity to achieve a ceasefire and restart the political process before it is too late.

I will not speak at length, as the assessment of the current situation is glaringly clear. However, I would like to express my regret that the co-Chairs of the ISSG have thus far failed to implement their agreement. We would also like to express our surprise and regret with regard to the differing accounts of what is taking place on the ground at this critical juncture, although the United States and Russia both possess the necessary technological prowess to monitor the situation.

I once again call upon them both to set aside their rivalries and political differences in order to bear their responsibilities and focus on coordinating their bilateral cooperation to implement the cessation of hostilities, without any media confrontations that may be used by some to aggravate the situation and kill all hope for a political process.

I also call upon all Powers with an ability to influence the conflict and the battles taking place on the ground to support the implementation of the agreement between Russia and the United States in good faith. I also call upon Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura to prepare for the relaunching of direct negotiations among the Syrian parties as soon as possible, without preconditions by any of those parties.

This is a wake-up call: hundreds of thousands have died and millions have been displaced. The time has come for us all to think first and foremost of the interests of the Syrian people. This must be done free of narrow interests, political aspirations or acts of external polarization on the part of those that have never cared for Syria, which have served to destroy the country and open the door to armed groups and terrorist organizations, allowing them to infiltrate Syria and impose their will.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank France, the United Kingdom and the United States for calling this meeting. It was necessary that the Security Council meet today, given the worsening situation. We are facing the most intensive wave of air strikes since the war in Syria began. I thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his work and for his refusal to throw in the towel.

Our first message can only be a firm condemnation of the brutality of the attacks that have taken place in recent days. The rejection of the cessation of hostilities by the Al-Assad regime and its declared intention to take over eastern Aleppo through assault certainly contravenes every resolution of the Security Council regarding this conflict. In the face of this challenge, the international community has the responsibility to take urgent measures. It is now up to those members of the Security Council with direct influence on the Al-Assad government, the Russian Federation in particular, to put an end to the escalation of violence in Aleppo. Despite the very serious nature of the situation, Spain continues to believe that it is still possible to find a way

out of this conflict through diplomatic means: we are with Staffan.

There are three key steps upon which we — the International Syria Support Group and the Security Council — must concentrate our efforts: first, guaranteeing a ceasefire; secondly, ensuring humanitarian access; and, thirdly, creating the necessary conditions to resume United Nations mediation. Spain therefore supports the proposal put forward by the United States to put an end to the air strikes. We continue to trust that it could serve as a basis for a new agreement between the co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group.

We support that proposal primarily because we believe that our priority should be on the humanitarian community, which requires minimum measures of confidence so that the conveyance of aid to Aleppo can resume. But we support it as well because we are aware of the importance of separating the opposition from terrorist groups. As highlighted by our Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Mr. García-Margallo, here a few days ago (see S/PV.7774), it is important to draw the line and make it clear to the opposition that the time has come to make a choice, to decide which side they are on, without any ambiguity.

We are open to considering options to improve the supervision of the cessation of hostilities, as proposed by France. However, the most urgent matter is to put an end to the fighting, in particular the indiscriminate attacks against civilians, the besieging of citizens uninvolved in the conflict and the destruction of critical buildings and infrastructure necessary for the survival of the inhabitants of Aleppo.

I conclude with a reference to the attack against the United Nations/Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy on 19 September. This is not just another serious attack against civilians in recent days, but also a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law that cannot go unpunished. We will attentively follow the conclusions of the investigation opened by the Secretary-General in order to demand accountability to an adequate extent.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): We thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing and for his stated determination not to give up on his mission, in which he has our full support.

We deeply regret that this meeting is being held due to such a negative turn of events in Syria, with the collapse of the ceasefire agreement, renewed air strikes and general fighting in the city of Aleppo. The devastating effects of the latest escalation of fighting on the civilian population cannot be overstated. It is deeply regrettable that the United States and the Russian Federation have been unable to effectively implement their coordinated agreement on a cessation of hostilities and collective action against the terrorist groups operating in Syria.

We share the frustration of most Council members. We were led to believe that the International Syria Support Group would be a more effective mechanism for spearheading the Syrian peace process. However, it seems that key stakeholders in the group are pursuing a diplomatic process that is losing credibility on the ground in Syria, here at the United Nations and in the eyes of world public opinion.

The concern that some key opposition groups are cooperating with known terrorist organizations is legitimate. It is essential to distinguish between them. However, indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas and facilities cannot be condoned, regardless of whether or not terrorist fighters might be present in those areas. It is also evident that there are elements seeking to undermine the efforts towards a cessation of hostilities and the provision of humanitarian assistance. We believe that it is time for the United States and Russia to involve other relevant stakeholders, including members of the Security Council, in the negotiation process for the modalities of a ceasefire agreement in order to provide a more effective and long-lasting solution to the key concerns that have so far stalled the process.

The Syrian Arab Republic cannot continue being a stage for international rivalries and for a proxy war between regional and international Powers. The political and humanitarian repercussions of the Syrian conflict are likely to hound us for generations to come unless a timely solution is found. Considering that secretive, bilateral negotiations have yielded very poor results in the quest for a final solution to the stalemate, we strongly request that a more open, inclusive approach be taken in order to salvage the prospects for peace and reconciliation and to deliver much-needed humanitarian relief for the civilian population, particularly in the city of Aleppo.

Finally, although in despair, we are ready and willing to join Security Council in responding to Mr. De Mistura's appeal to the Council to push for a cessation of violence and a weekly 48-hour ceasefire pause permitting the provision of humanitarian assistance, press for medical evacuations, and urge a

strong recommitment on the part of the co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group to salvage the cessation of hostilities agreement.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): By convening today's emergency meeting on a Sunday, it is our collective conscience that you, Madam, are appealing to. Just some four days after the high-level meeting that was organized here by your country, we meet here once again at the joint request of France, the United States and the United Kingdom, whom I thank for this initiative, to consider once again the untenable situation of the Syrian people, who are victims of a conflict that is completely out of their hands. I thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for the first-hand information he has provided us with and for his ongoing commitment to his work, despite calls for his resignation.

The President of Senegal announced here four days ago (see S/PV.7774) that what is happening in Syria is unsustainable. Despite meeting after meeting, negotiation after negotiation, resolution after resolution, under the bombs human lives are destroyed and houses, markets, schools and health-care clinics are destroyed in violation of all international humanitarian rules. Despite the praiseworthy efforts and good will of humanitarian organizations, an entire population is suffering and an entire country is collapsing along with its economy and rich, multi-faith cultural heritage. Here, four days ago, the President of Senegal asked how long this could last. The cessation of hostilities that was obtained through resolution 2268 (2016), and which is critical to the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance and the relaunching of the political process, is now seriously compromised.

Moreover, the hope we had pinned on the recent cessation of hostilities agreement reached between the United States of America and the Russian Federation, co-Chairs of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) — which provided safe humanitarian aid corridors and coordinated action against terrorist groups, in particular the Islamic State and Fatah al-Sham, formerly the Al-Nusra Front — has ultimately been dashed by the large-scale attack on eastern Aleppo. At the high-level meeting on 21 September, Senegal urged the ISSG co-Chairs to ensure the maintenance of the ceasefire. The Senegalese delegation reiterates its support for the establishment of a joint command centre to monitor the situation for as long as the ceasefire is in effect.

Given the serious nature of the situation in Syria, and in particular in Aleppo, Senegal is convinced more than ever that peace in Syria must be underpinned by scrupulous respect for international humanitarian law. That is why we support the three recommendations made by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. De Mistura: protection of civilian infrastructure, a 48-hour humanitarian relief pause and authorization of medical evacuation. He also told us that several loaded trucks are ready and waiting to go.

We therefore need a strong and lasting consensus among parties in the fight against terrorism, the international community's common enemy. For as long as the Council is divided and the International Syria Support Group is in deadlock, terrorist organizations will continue to thrive in Syria, attracting an increasing number of foreign terrorist fighters and making that country a safe haven for criminal groups. In the light of this sad observation, the Senegalese delegation reiterates its full confidence in Mr. De Mistura's ongoing efforts to seek a political solution to the Syrian crisis. War is not an option.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): As we talk here, bombs continue to fall in Aleppo. Children continue to die. Women continue to die. The elderly continue to die. Civilian protection, which we always claim to be a State's primary responsibility, does not seem that be much in practice today when we consider the intensification of events taking place in Aleppo.

What is happening is none other than a massacre. That is what occurs when bombs are dropped on the civilian population, medical facilities and schools. Nothing justifies a massacre — absolutely nothing. We thought that we might have been able to relax somewhat on the weekend after we bade farewell to our respective delegations, but last night we were summoned to this meeting. And now we ask, what will the Council do for Syria? What will be the result of our deliberations in the face of this horrendous situation?

Regrettably, I have come to the conclusion that, whatever we say in our respective speeches here to voice our disdain and reiterate our positions on the situation — I could reiterate our call to uphold humanitarian law, protect civilians amid the horror of war and for each sector to shoulder its responsibility — if the ghastly bombing of eastern Aleppo and its civilian population continues, the people there will not end up in the hands of the terrorists, they will simply be

exterminated. I could also reiterate our support for Mr. Staffan de Mistura. When my colleagues in Geneva and I talk about Staffan, we always refer to him as our constant hero. We are fascinated by his constancy and unfathomable optimism.

(*spoke in English*)

He is our constant hero, but he is not a superhero. If Staffan could make progress on his own and — we say this very frankly — if two members of the Security Council — I am referring to the United States and Russia — could resume talks and manage in some way to restore the process, my delegation and others could support it.

Once again, we urge the Russian Federation and the United States to attempt to meet as they have done many times in the past to resume the process. Without them, bombs will continue to be dropped, people will continue to die and the war itself will continue — we know that wars can be interminable — and the horror will continue. We believe that both the Russian Federation and the United States have acted in good faith as they worked together. We believe that many things have occurred to along the way to pull them apart. Nonetheless, following the example of our constant hero, we ask that they display a similar level of constancy and continue to work together because they will certainly find support among the vast majority of the members of the Council to help to gradually restore peace in Syria and give its people a semblance of a normal life.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I thank the President for having convened today's meeting to discuss, yet again, another numbing development.

Mr. Staffan de Mistura's latest update provides a bleak picture on the challenges that we face in Syria. Just four days ago, we received a strong and clear message from the Secretary-General in this very Chamber, (see S/PV.7774) highlighting our collective failure on Syria. I recall that all Council members, and even the Syrian representative, expressed hope and support for the 9 September agreement between the United States and Russia. Everyone in the Chamber agreed that there is no military solution to the conflict. We are all in agreement on need to abide by the cessation of hostilities, adhere to international law, protect civilians and allow humanitarian deliveries.

Alas, just when we thought that things could not possibly get any worse in Syria, we were gravely mistaken. We are again shocked by callous air strikes against civilians in Aleppo, carried out using incendiary weapons and bunker-buster bombs. Hundreds of people were killed or wounded, many of them children. Babies and children were trapped in the rubble and crushed to death. Nearly 2 million people are left desperately without access to running water as the city's main water pumping station was destroyed, placing children at the particular risk of water-borne diseases.

Malaysia condemns the latest military escalation in Aleppo, which constitutes a flagrant breach of the agreed cessation of hostilities and seriously undermines the 9 September agreement. The latest acts of aggression dash whatever benefit of the doubt we had accorded to the conflicting parties. It raises questions about the commitment and sincerity in upholding their obligations on the cessation of hostilities.

Malaysia calls on the conflicting parties not to lose sight of peace and to use every window of opportunity to urgently recommit to the 9 September agreement, particularly to cease fighting. I reiterate our demand for the conflicting parties to respect international humanitarian law, including in providing unfettered humanitarian access and in protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure, including children, relief or rescue personnel, schools and hospitals. I also echo the call by the Secretary-General for independent investigation and accountability on the various acts of atrocities against civilians that may constitute war crimes.

In conclusion, Malaysia views favourably the initiative by France to create a credible and effective monitoring mechanism to oversee and report on the ceasefire and humanitarian access. Malaysia stands ready to engage constructively on that proposal. At this point, we must not give up hope. We must not despair. We need to urgently move beyond verbal condemnations or pronouncements and we need to come up with effective and concrete actions that would make a difference to thousands of Syrian lives on the ground.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I thank the delegations of the United States, United Kingdom and France for the initiative to hold today's briefing, and the presidency for promptly responding to their request. We are also grateful to Special envoy Staffan de Mistura for his candid assessment and his courage.

The latest turn of events is extremely disturbing, especially on the heels of last week's high-level meeting on Syria in this very Chamber (see S/PV.7774). We condemn the decision of Damascus and its allies to stage an offensive against eastern Aleppo. It is a flagrant violation of all relevant Security Council resolutions and the most recent Geneva arrangements. Ukraine is not privy to all the details of the most recent rounds of negotiations among all the parties involved in the Syrian issue. However, what matters in this situation is the fact that the actions of the Syrian regime and its allies go against the very core of international humanitarian law. They violate every fundamental principle of human decency. Is that the state of affairs that the Security Council is prepared to accept as a fact of life, or is it something that the Council can finally master the courage to counter? The latter is dependent, of course, on the political will of just a couple of Council members, first and foremost on Russia.

More than 200 civilians were killed and 300 wounded in the last 48 hours of sustained aerial and ground bombing of besieged eastern Aleppo. It speaks volumes of the true intentions of Bashar Al-Assad and his Russian allies, and there is no doubt that such casualty numbers are not final. We agree with the Secretary-General's comments yesterday on the situation in Syria. We are also appalled by the chilling military escalation in Aleppo. The recent statement by the Syrian delegation at the General Assembly that

> "the victory was even greater because the Syrian army was progressing in the war against terrorism" (*see A/71/PV.16*)

appears particularly cynical and revealing.

Available information on the use of incendiary weapons and advanced munitions, such as bunker-buster bombs, in the ongoing fighting around Aleppo sheds greater light on destructive Russian involvement. Throughout the year, the Ukrainian delegation has repeatedly voiced reservations and doubts about the true nature of Russian involvement in the Syrian conflict. On repeated occasions, we have been proved right — which, by the way, does not make us happy.

In this case, we would have been delighted to have made a mistake. I am not going to repeat what we have said on numerous occasions. I will just say that any hopes of reaching a workable arrangement with Russia and the Al-Assad regime at this moment are misplaced. As long as these two parties are resolutely bound to a military solution, any pause in the fighting, any ceasefire agreement, any political hesitance or unwarranted benefit of the doubt will be mercilessly exploited by the hawks in Damascus and Moscow to improve their military positions and to strengthen their negotiation positions.

As we speak, Russia has just completed redeployment of additional Sukhoi Su-25 jets designed for close air support to Syria. Let us also convey a clear message to those planning to retake eastern Aleppo. The idea that a regime victory would lead to an enforced stability in Syria is a dangerous fantasy. The realization of the so-called Grozny scenario in Syria is not possible and not sustainble. I will remind the council that Grozny is the capital of Chechnya, the city that was razed to the ground by the Russian military in 1994 and 1995 during the First Chechen War. Those days, the Russian military commanders used to say that it was aimed to force terrorists out of the city with minimal casualties among civilians. Sounds familiar, does it not? If recent history is any guide, there are no prospects for a military solution in Syria. Those who think otherwise will have to face consequences of their actions on the battlefield and international arena alike. Is it worth more and more Syrian lives? I doubt it.

Mr. Okamura (Japan): I thank you, Madam, for convening this meeting. I would also like to extend my appreciation to Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his detailed briefing. Last week, the week of 19 September, was the high-level week for the General Assembly. It should have been a breakthrough for the crisis in Syria. We had already welcomed the agreement reached on 9 September between the United States and the Russian Federation.

We expected that the reduction in violence would allow for expanded and unimpeded humanitarian access and the resumption of the political process. Instead, this year's high-level week began with the shocking news from Oram Al-Kubra in rural Aleppo. A warehouse of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and a United Nations-SARC aid convey were attacked. Japan extends its sincere condolences to the families of all humanitarian workers killed while doing their invaluable work in Syria. Japan calls upon the United Nations to investigate this incident and to release the results publicly. Furthermore, Japan calls upon all of the relevant stakeholders to ensure the security of

humanitarian aid workers who engage in humanitarian assistance in Syria.

The results of the escalation of the fighting in Aleppo during the past few days is reported to have been extremely devastating. We express our deepest concern about the situation on the ground. Protection and access must be achieved urgently. A particularly serious test for humanitarian access will arrive on Monday. Humanitarian convoys scheduled to deliver items to eastern Aleppo are sitting at the Turkey-Syria border but the food supplies will soon expire. We strongly urge the Syrian Government, opposition groups, and all States that have influence on them to work to enable these trucks to enter into eastern Aleppo.

We all share the view that only an immediate ceasefire can alleviate this devastating situation. Without a ceasefire, the increase to humanitarian access, the protection of civilians, and the resumption of the political process will never be attained. The important thing now is to get the agreement between Russia and the United States back on track. In light of the horrible intensification of the fighting and the catastrophic humanitarian situation, we must overcome our differences and unite to halt this breathtaking tragedy.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of New Zealand.

As our colleague from Senegal reminded us, it is only four days since my Prime Minister convened a meeting in this Chamber (see S/PV.774), at which leaders agreed upon several points. They agreed that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. They agreed on the urgent need to stop the fighting and to put our combined efforts behind ensuring the arrangement between the United States and Russia to restore the cessation of hostilities. They agreed that the Syrian people had suffered far too much and that full, unhindered humanitarian assistance for those in need was essential, and they agreed on the need to create the conditions for the resumption of political talks.

Our leaders did not agree on everything pretend there were any easy solutions, but they did agree, at least, on this much. It is therefore with utter dismay that we find ourselves back in this Chamber as Syrian planes, reportedly with Russian support, inflict carnage on eastern Aleppo. These actions, which reportedly include the use of incendiary and other indiscriminate weapons, are disturbing and demonstrate total disregard for their devastating impact on civilians. But what is most appalling is that these actions are shattering any remaining hopes we had for maintaining the cessation of hostilities and getting the peace processes back on track.

As my Prime Minister made clear in this Chamber a few days ago, words are not enough. All those who claim to support peace must back words with action. My delegation demands that the Syrian Government immediately ceases bombing of civilians and demonstrates genuine commitment to achieving a negotiated peace, and we appeal to all those genuinely committed to a political solution to do the same, especially those with the greatest influence on the Syrian Government.

I speak in particular to those whose political and material support is making the Syrian Government's current actions possible. That support is undermining any remaining prospects for the peace process and it is destroying innocent lives under the guise of countering terrorism. The Syrian Government needs to ground its planes, hold back its armies, and honour its commitments under resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016). New Zealand appeals to the Government of Russia and to Iran, too. If they are serious about peace, they should do everything in their power in the coming days to halt the fighting and give the United States-Russia arrangement a chance. We recognize that the opposition, too, has responsibilities.

All those with influence over the opposition must encourage it to respect the ceasefire and disassociate itself from terrorist groups. However, what the Syrian Government and its allies are doing is making that disassociation harder and prolonging the war. All those involved in Syria need to take a hard look at themselves and ask whether they intend to be genuine collaborators in the search for peace. So, we too join other Council members in putting our full support behind Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria Staffan de Mistura's request and calls on the Council — his call for the support, his call for the cessation of hostilitiesand putting protection of civilians as a priority, the 48-hour pauses and medical evacuations.

We admire Mr. De Mistura's determination and his belief that the current course of events can be turned. For New Zealand's part, we will do what we can to find a common cause in the Council for action to enforce the cessation of hostilities in Syria, as he has asked of us. A

continuation of this conflict benefits no one, certainly not Syrian civilians.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): A colleague of the three States that called to convene this meeting — namely, the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom — mentioned that my country, Syria, is broken and moribund. I would like to reassure him that my country has never been broken and will never be broken. His words are tantamount to the dream of Satan to ascend to Paradise. These are mere mixed dreams that cannot be interpreted and they are meaningless. They are not worthy of a permanent member of the Security Council. As for the three permanent members together, they sounded as if they were reinventing the wheel when they said that the Syrian Government was trying to recapture Aleppo. What a great discovery! As if Aleppo were a town in Djibouti or Afghanistan — or in Brazil, for that matter. I reassure them that the Syrian Government will recapture the entire city of Aleppo. If the countries' of the permanent members of the Security Council each have one capital, we have two capitals, Damascus and Aleppo.

If Shakespeare or the pioneers of the Theatre of the Absurd, Jean Genet, Adamov, Kafka, Kierkegaard and Georges Shehadeh, were to come to life again, they would have written better tragedies and better plays than they did in their time. They would never have even heard the kind of lies that were told to King Lear. Some of them are mourning the deaths of the very persons whom they killed with their own hands. They weep crocodile tears. Thirteen times, the same three permanent members that called for this urgent meeting have aborted a presidential statement that would have condemned terrorist car bombs and suicide bombers as well as erroneous strikes by their own forces. Thirteen times, those countries aborted the adoption of a mere presidential statement condemning a terrorist act in Syria. They have also foiled the efforts of our friends in the Council to adopt resolutions condemning terrorism. But when a lone French terrorist named Mohammed Merah wreaked havoc in the French city of Toulouse, he was killed by 300 bullets at the hands of elite French forces. And good riddance. But no one in Syria or elsewhere ever called that French terrorist a member of a moderate armed opposition group. Nor do we refer to terrorists that way in the United States or other places. Even if Spain were to give away the Basque region — or France Corsica or Great Britain Scotland or the United States California or Texas — the Syrian Government would never relinquish one inch of its territory, as laid down in its Constitution and in international law.

Once again, the Council is meeting today at the request of a number of members who are attempting to rescue the armed terrorist groups that they falsely classify them as the moderate armed opposition. They do that whenever indications point to the possibility that these groups, under attack from the Syrian Arab Army and their allies, face defeat. They overlooked the crime committed by the Nur al-Din al-Zanki rebel group when they beheaded Abdullah Issa, a Palestinian child, before the eyes of the world. At that time, that rebel group, together with the Al-Nusra Front, was in control of the Handarat Palestinian refugee camp in Aleppo. We believe that the call for this urgent meeting is a message from the countries that called it to the Al-Nusra Front and the other terrorist groups, namely, that their support and political cover will continue unhindered, and that the weapon of terrorism as a means of political pressure on the Syrian Government and its allies is still viable.

It is the constitutional responsibility of the Syrian Government to protect our citizens from the acts of armed terrorist groups that have inflicted suffering on our people in Aleppo, a responsibility similar to that of other Council members. The Syrian Army and its allies began the military operation two days ago, specifically after the end of the so-called seven-day halt to military operations, in the wake of the failure of the so-called truce. They made every effort to protect civilians, advising them to stay away from the armed terrorist groups in neighbourhoods of eastern Aleppo. The Army made every effort to give civilians a safe exit and to provide them with housing and the basic necessities of life, including for those who had been deceived into taking up arms against the State. By contrast, the armed terrorist groups continued to prevent civilians from leaving eastern Aleppo, with the intention of using them as human shields. We know that there are 2 million inhabitants of Aleppo, 1.75 million of whom are living under the authority of the State in areas controlled by the State, while 275,000 are

hostages living under duress in eastern Aleppo, which is controlled by the Al-Nusra Front and its allies.

In that context, my country condemns the use of internationally prohibited weapons. We stress that all military operations conducted by the Syrian Army and its allies on Syrian territory abide by the Charter of the United Nations and international laws, and are consistent with the Council's resolutions on combating terrorism. In that respect, my Government denounces the fabricated accusations levelled by certain members of the Council and the most senior United Nations officials against the Syrian Army and its allies through alleging that they use internationally prohibited weapons or that they deliberately target civilians. Such false accusations by the most senior Secretariat officials will ensure that this international Organization will meet the same fate as the League of Nations. Such irresponsible behaviour will bring it down.

It is indeed bewildering that the Secretary-General and his senior aides should make such false accusations based on fabricated testimony given by terrorists. And this is while ignoring incontrovertible evidence that armed terrorist groups, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), have used chemical weapons dozens of times against military personnel and civilians and that ISIL has seized a chlorine gas factory situated 40 miles from Aleppo.

I have just received information to the effect that terrorists disguised as Syrian military personnel are plotting to use toxic chemicals, including yellow phosphorus, against Syrian civilians. The aim of the operation of these terrorists, dressed in Syrian military fatigues, is to fake photographs and videos that suggest that these crimes were committed by the Syrian military. That is exactly what they are now doing with pictures of the little boy named Omran and other victims. They are the victims of their terrorism, and the aim of the photographs is to blackmail the Council and world opinion. Those toxic chemical materials are located in a garbage dump outside the city of Suraqeb, north of Aleppo. The toxic material is 20 kilometres from Idlib, buried 12 metres underground in a depot containing six barrels of it. On 6 September, the warehouse housing yellow phosphorous material was visited by two female United States experts, who then left for Turkey.

This is a proof to the Security Council, like other tens of letters we have conveyed to this organ in connection with terrorist activities in my country.

Those who commit war crimes in Syria are well-known. They are the ones who killed more than 200 civilians in the town of Manbij, bombed a school for the deaf in Raqqa and targeted the Syrian army in Deir ez-Zor, in support of Da'esh, and who for the past several years have been providing all kinds of support for the tens of thousands of terrorists who have been brought to Syria from more than 100 countries, according to the Council's own reports.

My Government has a keener interest than anyone else in putting an end to the bloodshed in Syria and to the prolonged suffering of the Syrian people. Accordingly, we welcomed the United States-Russia agreement on fighting the two terrorist groups Da'esh and the Al-Nusra Front and their allies — distinguishing between the terrorist Al-Nusra Front and the so-called genetically modified moderate armed opposition groups — and ceasing hostilities for one week. While we were committed to the agreement, those who employ terrorist groups in Syria told them to reject it. More than 20 armed terrorist groups immediately rejected it, including the Ahrar Al-Sham, Nur al-Din al-Zanki and the Al-Nusra Front. That rejection was accompanied by targeting the Syrian Army on the Castello Road and at various other positions. They violated the agreement 300 times before it expired, leading to the martyrdom of 200 civilians and 157 military personnel, as well as to hundreds of seriously injured victims.

In a premeditated attempt to sabotage and bury the agreement before it began, the military aircraft of the so-called international coalition led by the United States bombarded the positions of the Syrian Arab Armed Forces fighting Da'esh in the area of Mount Thardeh in Deir ez-Zor. The terrorists seized a humanitarian assistance convoy in the Aleppo suburbs and set fire to it. As usual, this was accompanied by a fabricated media and political campaign that accused the Syrian Army and its allies of committing the crime. That was not the first time that these groups have committed such horrific crimes.

It is truly deplorable that certain members of the Council, in addition to the most senior United Nations officials, including the Secretary-General, continue to call on the Syrian Government and its allies to adhere to the cessation of hostilities — despite all kinds of evidence on the ground proving that since the beginning, those countries have been backing armed terrorist groups, which have never wanted and will never want this endeavour to succeed.

That was made abundantly clear by the violations of the agreement by the armed terrorist groups and the so-called international coalition. Worse still, the United States shirked the responsibility for its main obligation, namely, to differentiate between the Al-Nusra Front and those groups that it insists on classifying as moderate armed opposition groups. That avoidance of responsibility has aborted all the progress achieved over five years towards ending the war of terror imposed on our country, and clearly demonstrates a lack of political will on the part of those who sponsor terrorism to stop the bloodshed — as if the objective were to neutralize the Syrian forces fighting terrorism, especially the Syrian Air Force, instead of finding a solution to the crisis.

With the terrorist war now entering its sixth year, is it not time for certain members of the Council to stop deceiving themselves and public opinion by insisting on protecting and supporting what they refer to at times as the moderate opposition, at others as the moderate armed opposition and at still others as non-State armed groups? All such groups are only one side of the same coin — terrorism — which has had a boomerang effect, through attacks, terrorist activities and the propagation of extremist ideologies in those members' capitals, owing to their flawed policies and practices, which they continue to advocate against my country to this day. Would any representative in this Chamber dare to justify the support given by some for four years in the form of hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of tons of weaponry to Nur al-Din al-Zanki, the terrorists who beheaded that Palestinian child, an event that the Security Council has lamented today? That terrorist group, whose name demonstrates that it is an agent of the Turkish regime, exposed the political media campaigns and claims aimed at portraying it as a moderate opposition group when it announced that it was operating under the authority of the terrorist organization the Al-Nusra Front.

My country will remain committed to its national constitutional duty to combat terrorism in all its forms. It is now incumbent on certain members of the Council and other members of the international community to end their exploitation of the Syrian people's suffering, which they have created themselves through their military, political and financial support for armed terrorist groups. The politicization of the humanitarian crisis, aimed at achieving ends that have nothing to do with humanity or the interests of the Syrian people, will lead only to a prolongation of the crisis and of the plight of Syrian people, as well as a proliferation of terrorism that threatens international peace and security.

Our commitment to fighting terrorism goes hand in hand with our commitment to reaching a political solution through intra-Syrian talks through which the Syrians shall decide the future of their country without any foreign intervention. Solutions imposed from outside are totally rejected by the Syrian people.

With regard to solutions imposed from abroad, they are completely and categorically rejected by the Syrian Government. In that regard, I must emphasize that any political solution can be successful only if it provides the necessary support and circumstances that will enable it to be implemented through efforts to combat terrorism and to continue national reconciliation, which has already succeeded in many areas.

Finally, everyone must realize that the real war against terrorism has not yet begun. The victory of the Syrian Government and its allies over terrorism is inevitable. That victory will be part of the Security Council's resolutions on combating terrorism and in the maintenance of international peace and security.

I would like to conclude by saying that the Syrian Air Force has air-dropped assistance to the residents of Deir ez-Zor, the city that fell victim to the terrorism of ISIL in the wake of the bombing by the United States Air Force of the Syrian army bases that protected it.

The President: I now again give the floor to Mr. De Mistura to respond to Council members' comments.

Mr. De Mistura: I wish to respond to one specific question, which was very precise and clearly raised by the Ambassador of the Russian Federation.

First, I would like to reply that I am guided by the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and by resolution 2254 (2015), both with regard to the agenda and the invitations. I have in the past — and this is my reply — witnessed refusals for active direct talks from the High Negotiations Committee, which set preconditions. I asked the Ambassador of Syria, who was also the representative of the Syrian Government in Geneva, whether the Syrian delegation wanted to have at that time direct talks with the delegations that were present at the times. The Ambassador of Syria — I ask him to correct me if I am wrong — indicated that he did not want to discuss with terrorists or representatives of terrorists or participants in terrorism. I can confirm

that I will send the invitations. Obviously, the political process cannot be held hostage by the security environment.

At the same time, let me recall what was stated in that regard. On that special day — I consider 9 September a special day, or evening rather — there was a long and very detailed discussion between the Russian Federation and the United States. At that time, I made a statement on behalf of the United Nations in which I said the following:

> "The United Nations hopes that the implementation of this understanding will facilitate without preconditions renewed efforts to reach a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political settlement of the conflict, as called for by the Geneva communiqué and by resolution 2254 (2015). I will then proceed to consult with the Secretary-General and the International Syria Support Group in order to be able to launch it."

That is still my hope. I can therefore confirm that when I send the invitations, as per resolution 2254 (2015), I will do that for direct talks.

The President: The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to make a simple clarification and to comment about what the Special Envoy has just said.

At the Vienna II conference, held to prepare for Geneva, Jordan was charged with determining who was a terrorist and who was not, and Saudi Arabia was charged with determining who was in the opposition and who was not, so that we could take those two definitions to Geneva with us. Neither Jordan nor Saudi Arabia established such definitions, and the problem was again referred to the Geneva conference. We then found out that terrorists had been invited to the Geneva conference. Afterwards, they were excluded because everyone found out that they were terrorists.

On the other hand, the Syrian Government has been repeatedly to Geneva and will return there to engage in an intra-Syrian dialogue — not a Syrian terrorist dialogue — without outside interference and without any impositions. Therefore, we need the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria to gather all the opposition groups in one delegation, which would come to negotiate with the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic. We are not prepared to negotiate with terrorists, or with hundreds of genetically modified armed terrorist groups. We are a Government that is prepared to negotiate with one united delegation of the national opposition that truly desires an intra-Syrian settlement without outside interference.

We do not consider all members of the opposition terrorists, as was suggested by the statement of the Special Envoy. However, we would like to negotiate with those who believe in Syria and in the future of Syria and the dialogue among Syrians without their being used in the service of external agendas. I reiterate that the Syrian Government is prepared to return to Geneva and to resume the dialogue, but not with the deaf or the mute or the blind. We want to resume the dialogue with Syrian nationals like us who believe in our country and do not serve an external agenda and spend their days in five-star hotels and get paid by Governments who use them in cheap tricks.

The meeting rose at 1.40 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7778

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7778th meeting
Tuesday, 27 September 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Taula	(New Zealand)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gimolieca
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia (S/2016/763)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia (S/2016/763)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Somalia to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Abdusalam Hadliyeh Omer, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Investment Promotion of the Federal Republic of Somalia.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Michael Keating, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, and Mr. Francisco Caetano Jose Madeira, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia and Head of the African Union Mission in Somalia, to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Mr. Madeira, who is joining us via video-teleconference from Mogadishu.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/763, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on Somalia.

I now give the floor to Mr. Keating.

Mr. Keating: Much has happened since the Council visited Mogadishu on 19 May. Let me begin straight away with what is no doubt for all of us the immediate concern — the electoral process — before I turn to related developments in Somalia.

About 24 hours ago, the Federal Indirect Electoral Implementation Team (FIEIT) announced that Somalia's electoral process would require an additional 30 days, culminating in the election of a new President of the Federal Republic by the end of November. The renewed delay raises a number of fears. Let me name just two: first, that the process is being politically manipulated, and secondly, that this delay may only be one of yet further rolling delays.

The scope for political manipulation of the process remains high, but having closely accompanied the work of the FIEIT and its regional counterparts, the state-level indirect electoral implementation teams, I believe that this further delay was not orchestrated by any actor seeking immediate political benefit. Indeed, the FIEIT insisted that it needed more time over the objections of powerful political actors, including presidential candidates, the international community and this very Council. The President has actually shared his concerns about the delay with me, as have other leading actors. The Council repeatedly stressed that Somalia must avoid an extension of the constitutionally mandated term limits, but the Council has also emphasized the importance of a transparent, inclusive, fair and credible process that yields a Somali Government and Parliament enjoying enhanced legitimacy. There is a creative tension between doing this as thoroughly as possible and doing it on time.

Parliamentary elections will now take place between 23 October and 10 November, and the presidential election by 30 November. What is most critical at this point is that the new extension does not create additional space for manipulation or disruption by spoilers. Rather, the urgency and momentum must be maintained and the additional time used to ensure that the process is as transparent and credible as possible. Much preparatory work has been completed and implementation has in fact begun. Registration of the 14,000 delegates and hundreds of parliamentary candidates is in progress. In parallel, the nomination of candidates for the new federal Upper House is under way.

There is a further challenge. Under the constitution, the mandate of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was to have ended by 10 September. The Security Council, in its presidential statement of 19 August (S/PRST/2016/13), noted the National Leadership Forum's consensual decision to extend the current mandates of the federal institutions to respect the electoral calendar adopted in early August. Against the backdrop of an additional delay, it will nonetheless be critical to avoid an institutional vacuum while, at the same time stressing that this should be a de facto caretaker period, with no major decisions or declarations by any of the existing institutions.

The 2016 electoral process is a novel and exciting experience for a country that last held national elections in 1969. It is best described as a political process with electoral features, rather than just as an election. Every aspect of the electoral model has been politically negotiated, with many painful compromises made between interest groups and clans. There has been a tendency among many actors to try and resolve long-standing and highly complex political issues through this process, including — to name just a few — the status of the federal capital, Somaliland, Hiraan and Middle Shabelle, the role of political parties, corruption and illicit financial flows, the rights of minorities, and women's long fight for justice and equality .

The electoral model is imperfect. No one is entirely happy with it, and that may be a good sign. It is literally extraordinary — a one-off never to be repeated again. It took over a year to fashion, in an exhaustive process that included unprecedented public consultations. And yet, this process has electoral features that are critical to Somalia's aspiration to undertake one-person/one-vote elections in 2020, and that signify the overall progress that Somalia has made since 2012.

These features include the election of a new Upper House on a geographical, not just clan basis; a step away from the so-called 4.5 formula; the conduct of the election in at least five locations around the country, not just Mogadishu; genuine competition for seats in both houses; the establishment of an independent implementation body; and the setting of clear rules of the game. They also include the broadening of the electoral college from just 135 men in 2012 to more than 14,000 citizens, 30 per cent of whom must be women and 20 per cent youth. And there have been a number of hard-won provisions to realize the commitment made by the National Leadership Forum to 30 per cent seats being reserved for women.

Even though the numbers involved may seem relatively modest, this is a complicated process requiring a high degree of dedication, organizational capacity and some bravery to implement. The security and logistical challenges alone are considerable. Allow me to pay tribute here to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and Somali security authorities for planning and protecting the process. There are likely to be attacks by Al-Shabaab, and possibly violence instigated by others.

The process includes not just a secret ballot and instantaneous communication of results, but also other measures put in place with United Nations technical support to bolster the credibility of the process. These include a code of conduct for all candidates — parliamentary and presidential — and the creation of an electoral dispute resolution mechanism. The latter is now being established with, significantly, the inclusion of advisors provided by the international community. There shall also be electoral monitors provided by the African Union, the European Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, as well as local Somali organizations.

All this has been organized at great speed, in the absence of national institutional capacity and with little local experience of organizing anything on this scale for many decades. I am therefore under no illusion about the challenges ahead and the scope for things to go awry, but if we remain vigilant and unified this process could mark a positive, watershed moment for Somalia.

The road to peace and stability in Somalia will still be a long one. The FIEIT declaration that the voting for the regions of Hiraan and Middle Shabelle should take place in Mogadishu rather than in those two regions risks deepening clan differences related to the formation of the last remaining proto-federal member state. Efforts must therefore continue to advance an inclusive and, ultimately, sustainable state formation process in Hiraan and Middle Shabelle. Allow me to recognize IGAD's valiant efforts in that regard.

Violence remains a feature of life for too many people. Al-Shabaab has continued to mount spectacular attacks against soft targets, notably in Mogadishu. The most egregious of these were on 21 August in Galkayo and on 30 August against the Somali Youth League hotel in Mogadishu. Civilians have been the main victims. These attacks have underscored the urgency of efforts both to degrade, defeat and dismantle Al Shabaab and to address the conditions that make it possible for the group to survive. AMISOM remains vital to Somalia's security. Its troops are paying a heavy price to bring security to the country. They need to be supported in their effort to take the fight to Al Shabaab-controlled areas.

Somalia has also seen the repatriation of an unprecedented number of refugees from Dadaab in

neighbouring Kenya. This has raised anxieties about Somalia's ability to absorb returnees, given an internally displaced population already estimated at more than 1 million and extremely fragile host communities. Efforts are under way, involving federal and federal member state authorities, as well as the United Nations and partners, to pursue durable solutions. Concerns are also increasing about the growing number of people — now close to 5 million — suffering from malnutrition and food insecurity. I regret to say that only 32 per cent of the humanitarian response plan has been funded at this point.

And Somalis continue to face multiple human rights deficits. On 4 September, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, along with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, issued a public report on freedom of expression. While significant, commendable legal and institutional measures are being put in place by the Somali leadership — including the passage of the national human rights commission law — the fact is that harassment and intimidation of journalists, members of Parliament and civil society actors remains widespread.

The situation of women and children, including children captured from Al-Shabaab and sentenced to death, is of grave concern. The July visit of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict reinforced advocacy with both the Federal Government and the Government of Puntland regarding the need to uphold international law, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Somalia ratified last year. Yesterday, the Puntland authorities told my Deputy that they would immediately transfer all children under 15 to a rehabilitation centre and revisit the death sentences that were handed down.

The challenges are considerable but, crucially, progress is being made in almost every domain. On 10 September, IGAD held a meeting of Heads of State and Government in Mogadishu— the first such summit on Somali soil in 42 years. The significance and psychological impact of this should not be underestimated. Central to continued progress will be the arduous task of establishing institutions that are both capable and trusted by all Somalis. Accountable governance and capacity across the board is at the heart of the State-building agenda. The good news is that many of the conflicts between clans and power-brokers that have plagued Somalia over the past decades have been converted into politics. Administrative capacity is gradually being established around the emerging federal architecture — an architecture that did not exist a few years ago — and the political basis for that institutional capacity, whether to strengthen the rule of law, generate revenues, provide public services, fight corruption or improve security, is broadening.

An important development has been the emergence of the National Leadership Forum as a key decision-making body. Its status will need to be resolved, like so much else, through the constitutional review. But its political value as a forum for bringing the country's leadership together, both from the Federal Government and regional states, is beyond doubt. That has been evident recently in the security field, not only in approving the new policing model, consistent with Somalia's federal architecture, but in its latest meeting two weeks ago, by deciding to establish a National Security Committee. That provides the international community a docking point for advancing a comprehensive approach to security that encompasses policing, community recovery and the extension of State authority, and efforts to counter violent extremism. I am delighted that the Government issued a national strategy and action plan for the preventing and countering of violent extremism only two weeks ago.

A major priority now is to define and implement a plan for structuring and strengthening the Somali national security forces, at the same time as strengthening the capacity of security forces to accompany AMISOM in taking the fight back to Al-Shabaab. The AU Commissioner for Peace and Security has said that AMISOM's transition will begin in October 2018. There is therefore no time to lose to build capable, accountable and affordable security forces trusted by all Somalis.

Other key priorities, beyond the electoral process, include the review and finalization of the federal constitution, agreement on revenue and resource management and sharing, preparations for one-person one-vote elections in 2020, which will be a formidable undertaking, and steps to attract both private and public international investment, including through debt relief. So there is no shortage of tasks at hand, but progress towards them is encouraging.

Allow me to conclude by thanking the members of the Security Council for their unified position on

Somalia and for the advice and support that I continue to receive. We are determined to ensure that the electoral process is implemented, fully aware of the risks, with no further delays, and we are aware of the consequences if it is not seen as legitimate and complete. But if all goes well, the stage is set for the Somalis to take their country to a new level of membership of the international community in the coming months.

The President: I thank Mr. Keating for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Madeira.

Mr. Madeira: I would like to express my full agreement with everything that Ambassador Keating said in his briefing. I shall therefore limit my intervention to security aspects, specifically in relation to security for the election itself, the security of the candiates, the offensives and our exit strategy.

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is working hand in hand with the Somali national security forces and the election security task force, and we are making progress. There was an issue with Cadaado, and agreement was recently reached whereby AMISOM would deploy in Cadaado in the coming days to ensure that the security aspects of the election are well looked after.

With regard to the security of the candidates, the election security plan for the 2016 elections, jointly adopted by the Federal Government of Somalia, AMISOM and the United Nations, already foresaw the possibility of requests for personal security, as is already happening. However, the issue was equally widely debated by members of the international community accredited in Somalia and based in Mogadishu and Nairobi, who devoted a specific meeting to discussing the security to be provided to traditional elders, candidates and other eminent persons participating in the electoral process, the electorate, election bodies, observers, election facilities, public venues, accommodation premises and the community in general, so as to ensure an incident-free election. Participants unanimously concluded that, given the large number of elders, candidates, eminent persons and other entities in need of special protection and security during the electoral period, it was materially impossible to provide dedicated personal security to individual candidates, elsers and eminent persons at their residences or in the form of convoys and escorts, due to reduced capacity and a scarcity of equipment and other resources. However, it was agreed that collective security for them would be possible. That would be provided for a predefined period prior to, during and after the elections, in specifically designated locations, such as election centres, assembly points, polling stations, some public venues and buildings, as well as hotels, residential areas and other duly identified accommodation premises.

In that context, we are currently seeing the movement of various security groups converging onto Mogadishu. That is causing a serious security problem, as Al-Shabaab can just disguise themselves as such a group and do damage. Somali national security forces and AMISOM are working on this and discussing these matters to see how these specific issues can be handled. An important meeting will take place tomorrow in that regard.

Another important aspect is the need to continue the offensives to dislodge Al-Shabaab from its hideouts and to degrade and disrupt their activities and eventually destroy it. In that connection, it becomes extremely important that this time the offensive not just be for us to remove Al-Shabaab from its hideouts; we need to effectively occupy the cities and towns that Al-Shabaab presently occupies so that they do not come back to retake them. To that end, we need to work hand in hand with the forces in place, local populations and Somali national forces. For that, those forces and entities need support. Such support is not yet forthcoming. It is important that specific attention be given to this matter; otherwise we will continue to do what we have done many times, removing Al-Shabaab from towns and then having to do it again once they return.

Capacity-building for the Somali security forces is a central concern. There is no way that AMISOM or any other external forces can bring lasting peace to Somalia unless and until the Somalis themselves are capable of taking over responsibility for the security of their country. We have been given 21,000 uniformed troops, which are presently benefiting from Security Council-approved logistical support. Those forces are still not capable of taking on Al-Shabaab in a sustainable manner because they lack the basics — coordinated training, a common doctrine, uniforms, equipment, rifles and even barracks where they can be housed and trained. We need to address those issues with the required urgency.

As was rightly said, AMISOM is organizing itself in a manner to be able to start leaving Somalia by 2018. It would not be the right thing to do if by that time Somalia is still not capable of taking care of its security responsibilities.

What must be done in that regard is very clear. The 2016 African Union-AMISOM concept of operations clearly outlines the steps that have to be taken, and those steps start with us — dislodging Al-Shabaab from the main towns in Lower Shabelle and from the main port cities in the north-east of the country, and to do that we need everyone to cooperate, particularly the Somali National Army. The Commissioner for Peace and Security presented a very detailed letter to the appropriate United Nations bodies in New York. We would like to ask the Council to look at that letter, consider what each point means and aims to achieve and give us a response as quickly as possible, because the rainy season is starting and we need to launch our offensives. A plan has already been adopted and we are about to leave, but we badly need the logistical support that has to be approved by the Council.

The President: I thank Mr. Madeira for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the member of the Security Council who wishes to make a statement.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation has asked for the floor in the belief that today's meeting is informative not just for the Security Council but for the membership in general. As an elected, non-permanent member of the Council, we feel that it is up to us to share the information with the membership that elected us — that is, to share our opinions about what is discussed at such meetings. We feel that this helps improve transparency in our work.

I would like to thank Mr. Keating and Mr. Madeira for their detailed briefings, and especially for their excellent work and untiring dedication in what is an extremely difficult area in every sense. We saw the difficulties on the ground for ourselves when we visited Mogadishu in May.

Uruguay believes that we have seen genuine progress in recent months in creating a federal State in Somalia, including preparing the framework needed for a political transition this year. Somalia has embarked on the process of transitioning power that will eventually produce a new Parliament and Government. It is a decisive and historic moment on the country's path to consolidating a democratic, inclusive, stable and fully empowered State. Somalia has also begun to prepare the way for general elections in 2020 on the basis of one person, one vote. That progress could still falter, however, which is why Uruguay was very sorry to hear the news received in just the past few hours of another postponement of the election dates previously announced for October and November. We strongly urge the Somali authorities to stick to the new dates.

Uruguay deplores the continuing threat of the terrorist group Al-Shabaab, which is the main threat to peace and security in Somalia. It continues to be a latent problem in the centre and southern parts of the country in spite of the efforts to deal with it. Unfortunately it appears that Al-Shabaab is likely to step up its activity during the run-up to the elections. In our view, it seems clear that security sector reform is key, especially regarding the provision of fast and effective training for the Somali National Army. Operations with the regional forces should be planned and coordinated in order to facilitate more effective participation by the National Army in joint operations with the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which will enable the Federal Government's security forces, including the police, to take on more responsibility for maintaining peace and security and protecting Somali citizens.

Uruguay is very concerned about the increased violations of human rights in the first half of the year, mainly as a result of security operations and Al-Shabaab's activities. The measures in place for preventing sexual violence and protecting people from it are still inadequate, and the issue is a particular problem for internally displaced persons and civilians affected by the conflict. Despite the significant commitments for protecting children that the Somali authorities have made in the past few years, the detention of children for alleged links to Al-Shabaab is still worrying. Uruguay calls on the Government of Somalia to ensure that children are treated primarily as victims and that its guiding principles are the best interests of the children involved and international standards for their protection. The death sentences that have been given to children in Puntland are unacceptable and violate international instruments regarding children.

Uruguay would particularly like to emphasize the importance of protecting civilians, particularly children, women and the elderly, and we urge the Federal Government of Somalia to pursue mediation and stability, especially in areas where access to supplies and

humanitarian aid is vital. We reiterate that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, AMISOM and the international community should work more closely than ever, and with better coordination, with regional administrations and the Federal Government in order to prioritize capacity-building and the strengthening of regional institutions, so as to help regional administrations to consolidate and gradually create the conditions needed for providing governance, security and basic services to local populations.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Somalia.

Mr. Omer (Somalia): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on New Zealand's stewardship of the Security Council in the month of September. I am grateful for this opportunity to brief the Council today.

There is a new dawn in Somalia. As I am speaking here today, many aspirant parliamentarians are returning to their constituencies to win over voters so that they can represent them in the next Parliament. Billboards and campaign material for the presidential hopefuls are all over the city as the candidates seek to win the hearts and minds of the Somali people ahead of the election. That is a truly historic leap forward in terms of democratization in Somalia, and clear evidence of the spirit and values of democracy that are taking shape in our country. It is clear how much progress has been made, and Somalis are justly proud of the steps they have taken to establish institutions, lay the foundations for an inclusive federal State and rebuild their country from the ground up. And the direction is upwards. It may not be as rapid or as smooth as we would like, but Somalia is making progress.

Somalia faces the dual challenge of advancing development and reform initiatives in a complex environment. With the support of our brave national security services and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), we are successfully fighting a war against international terrorism. The threat is indeed international, because today no country, no matter how powerful, can insulate itself from terrorism. Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaida, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, Boko Haram and others are a threat to all of us, wherever we are, simply because we refuse to conform to their futile, violent ideology. Terrorism is truly an evil without purpose or geography and can be defeated only in partnership across all sectors internationally.

Over the past four years, the Somali National Army and AMISOM have regained key towns and cities. Today, Al-Shabaab controls less than 10 percent of the country's territory. In recent months, many of its key leaders have been eliminated and others have defected, and their violent ideology is truly shunned by the Somali people.

The Somali national forces and AMISOM have proved that Al- Shabaab is vulnerable and divided and can be defeated through coordinated military action time and again. Owing to the success of the joint operations of the Somali National Army and AMISOM, Al-Shabaab has turned to small-team asymmetric warfare tactics to conduct higher-impact terror attacks against soft targets in Somalia and, increasingly, in neighbouring countries.

In response, our Government is working with partners and neighbours to enhance security cooperation so as to enable us to respond to the threat together and swiftly. The Somali Federal Government and the Somali people are grateful to the troop-contributing countries within AMISOM for their support in stabilizing our nation. We fully recognize the great sacrifices that their soldiers have made and continue to make in the service of our country and our people's future. Their courage and service will never be forgotten, and their memories will always be honoured by us.

In the long term, it is fundamental that the Somali national security forces be in a position to take over the entire security responsibilities of Somalia and for Somalis from AMISOM. This is the only way we can truly achieve sustainable peace and development both in Somalia and across the region.

In order to achieve this, there is agreement on and full understanding of the importance of an inclusive political agreement on the future of Somali security arrangements and the urgency of building up effective security-sector reform in Somalia, ahead of the agreed AMISOM drawdown in 2018.

The best evidence of our Government's commitment to leading on our national security is that the security forces training and integration process is ongoing and the new policing model has been endorsed by all stakeholders. In addition, we are ensuring that our national security forces work closely alongside AMISOM to ensure that they put their training to effective use and actively participate in liberating the

few remaining areas of the country held by Al-Shabaab as soon as possible.

Furthermore, at the last National Leadership Forum meeting last week, the national security policy was endorsed. This will be our blueprint and guide to ensuring a safer Somalia, region and world through partnership and joint action. Last week's National Leadership Forum underscored the importance of protecting our electoral process from terrorist spoilers in all areas where elections are scheduled to happen.

On this matter, it was also agreed, during the historic twenty-eighth Extraordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), held in Mogadishu last week, which was attended by the Presidents of Uganda and of Kenya, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and delegations from Djibouti, the Sudan and other IGAD member States, that the Somali national security forces and AMISOM would work even more closely to meet this need. While our commitment to defending our country and taking full responsibility for our national security is ironclad, there is still a need for further training and mentoring for the national security forces within a coordinated framework between the Somali Federal Government and donors. In addition, there is also a need to adequately equip our national forces so that they can effectively respond to the AMISOM drawdown in 2018. Therefore, the continuing financial and technical assistance of valuable international partners to the national security forces in a timely and responsive manner is a must.

In this regard, we welcome the communiqué of the special event for Somalia on security held in London and co-hosted by Tobias Ellwood, the United Kingdom Minister for the Middle East and Africa, and Mike Penning, the Minister for the Armed Forces, on 7 September 2016, in which many of our partners were also present and actively participated.

That being said, we recognize the concern that delays in the electoral process raise for our partners, and we are not blind to the need to demonstrate our commitment to holding a credible, timely and inclusive electoral process. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the commitment of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, the Federal Government of Somalia, the National Leadership Forum and all political stakeholders in Somalia to this process.

The Federal Government of Somalia has worked tirelessly in the past four years to reduce key threats to peace, security and stability in Somalia. I would like to reassure the Security Council of the unwavering commitment of the Federal Government to holding a credible and inclusive electoral process in 2016. The Somali people are excited by this positive move towards democracy, and the different electoral commissions, as well as the Somali people in general, are working tirelessly on the implementation of the electoral mechanism in line with the new agreed timelines. We are fully engaged in working to ensure that more Somalis than ever before can have a say in the future governance of their country and that Somalia's positive trajectory can be maintained.

This includes reserving 30 per cent of the seats in the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament for women, as their representation and political participation is central to our national progress. This is not just rhetoric.

To ensure there is no further delay to the electoral process, the presidents of the existing and emerging federal member states will be expected to submit the names of candidates for the Upper House of the Federal Parliament by 5 October. While the parliamentary elections will be held from 23 October to 10 November, the presidential election will now take place on 30 November.

The election of speakers of both houses of Parliament will be held on 23 November. The Federal Indirect Electoral Implementation Team also announced a breakthrough on the electoral venue for the Hiraan and Middle Shabelle regions, following negotiations with traditional elders representing the two regions.

The electoral oversight team also called for the speedy deployment of the African Union Mission and the Somalia troops to Galmudug, the capital of Cadaado, to bolster the security of the electoral process in that federal member state. The Federal Indirect Electoral Implementation Team also signalled the need for an immediate solution to the issue of Somaliland's representation in the Upper House in order to ensure its participation in this electoral process.

The transition from conflict to stability is a long-term endeavour. The electoral process in 2016 is an essential step in the transition towards a democratic and stable Somalia, and we are grateful for the support of our partners and the Security Council in implementing the process. The Somali people are ready and waiting

for this process to be completed. The Somali leadership is committed to doing so, and the only game in town is the electoral process. While it has not happened as quickly or gone as smoothly as we hoped, it will happen, and it will happen within the new timeline we have set out. I ask the Council to continue to support us; in return, we will uphold our commitments to the timeline in 2016 and forward to universal elections in 2020. We appreciate the Council's support.

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7779

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7779th meeting
Wednesday, 28 September 2016, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Van Bohemen	(New Zealand)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Zagaynov
	Senegal	Mr. Barro
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Fesko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramirez Carreño

Agenda

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Health care in armed conflict

Letter dated 18 August 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2016/722)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Protection of civilians in armed conflict

Health care in armed conflict

Letter dated 18 August 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2016/722)

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Joanne Liu, International President of Médecins Sans Frontières, and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. Maurer is joining us via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/722, which contains a letter dated 18 August 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: I thank New Zealand for convening today's debate, and I welcome Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Ms. Joanne Liu, International President of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). ICRC and MSF play a critical role in providing health care in the most difficult and dangerous circumstances. I pay tribute to their staff and all medical personnel under fire for their dedication and professionalism.

This morning, we awoke to reports of strikes on two more hospitals in Aleppo. Let us be clear — those using ever-more destructive weapons know exactly what they are doing. They know they are committing war crimes. We can only imagine the destruction — people with limbs blown off; children in terrible pain with no relief, infected, suffering and dying, with nowhere to go and no end in sight. Let us imagine a slaughterhouse. This is worse. Even a slaughterhouse is more humane. Hospitals, clinics, ambulances and medical staff in Aleppo are under attack around the clock.

According to Physicians for Human Rights, 95 per cent of medical personnel who were in Aleppo before the war have fled, been detained or killed. This is a war against Syria's health workers. One medical professional spoke of how he endured the difficulty and the dangers. "This is Aleppo", he said. "We do not have time to be scared. We are being crushed like bugs daily, and the world has abandoned us."

The global public does not distinguish between Member States, the Security Council and the Secretary-General. They know only one thing — the world has let them down. We have let them down. There must be action. There must be accountability. International law is clear — medical workers, facilities and transports must be protected. The wounded and sick, civilians and fighters alike, must be spared. Deliberate attacks on hospitals are war crimes. Denying people access to essential health care violates international humanitarian law.

On 3 May, the Council adopted resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of medical care in armed conflict around the world. Since May, there has been no let-up. In Hajjah, Yemen, 19 people were killed last month in an attack on a hospital run by Médecins Sans Frontières. This forced the organization to evacuate its staff from six hospitals in the area, with untold consequences for sick and injured women, children and men. In Pakistan, more than 70 people were killed in a suicide attack on Sandeman Provincial hospital on 8 August. And in Syria, the carnage continues and no one is spared.

The World Humanitarian Summit and the Agenda for Humanity reaffirmed that safeguarding humanity in armed conflict must be a priority. The Council has a unique responsibility and influence in that area. Resolution 2286 (2016) urges parties to armed conflict and Member States to take concrete action. The recommendations I have submitted to the Council provide detailed steps to improve the protection of medical staff and facilities, as well as the wounded and sick.

First is prevention. Member States should do all they can to promote respect for medical care in armed conflict; align national legislation with international humanitarian law; establish dialogue among medical personnel, civil society organizations

and the authorities; train all those involved in the laws and standards that apply; and ensure that decisions on foreign policy, including those involving weapons sales and transfers, respect the provision of medical care in conflict.

Second is protection. Member States and parties to conflict must take precautions to safeguard medical facilities and personnel when they plan and conduct military operations. My recommendations cover military orders, the location of targets, visible military presence in and around medical facilities, the issuing of advance warnings and evacuations, among other aspects.

Third is accountability. Member States and parties to conflict should ensure that those responsible for violations are prosecuted and punished. They should also provide reparations and support to people and communities affected by such attacks. That will mean conducting systematic and impartial investigations into specific incidents and collecting and analysing better and more extensive data.

Attacks and access restrictions on medical care are signs of a broader erosion of respect for international humanitarian law. Failure to act is an affront to our shared humanity. It undermines States' legal obligations and the multilateral system as a whole. Building on pledges made at the World Humanitarian Summit, we need a global effort to enhance respect for the laws that safeguard humanity.

The Council has a key role to play. I call on members to take decisive steps so that protecting health care facilities and personnel during conflict moves from aspiration to reality. More than this, I urge them to overcome their divisions and meet their responsibilities in Syria and around the world.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Liu.

Ms. Liu: Last week, the world witnessed a savage attack on a United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent humanitarian convoy and on a hospital near Aleppo. Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon said: "Just when we think it cannot get any worse, the bar of depravity sinks lower". Indeed, it does.

The conduct of war today knows no limits. It is a race to the bottom. The unrelenting assault on Aleppo by Russian and Syrian forces over recent days — with no evacuations possible and bodies lying unburied — testifies to that. On 3 May, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2286 (2016). Council members pledged to protect civilians and the medical services they need to survive. The adopted the resolution in the wake of the obliteration of Al-Quds Hospital in Aleppo by the Syrian Government and its allies. It was just the latest in a staggering number of such attacks.

Five months later, the resolution has plainly failed to change anything on the ground. This failure reflects a lack of political will among Member States fighting in coalitions and those who enable them. There can be no more waiting. Council member should make their pledges operational.

Since the resolution was adopted, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) alone has experienced more horrific attacks. In early August, our hospital in Abs, Yemen, was destroyed in a Saudi-led coalition airstrike. Nineteen people,including patients and health workers, were killed. The GPS coordinates of that fully functioning hospital had been shared with belligerents, including the Saudi military. It did not matter. It was the fourth such attack against MSF facilities in Yemen in less than one year — killing 32 people and injuring 51 in total. Our team had to withdraw from the north of Yemen, leaving scores behind with reduced medical care, which Saudi carpet-bombing then further reduced. The Saudi-led coalition and its opponents are so negligent, and their rules of engagement so loose, that this war truly stands apart. Many attacks are brushed off as mistakes committed in the fog of war. Let me be clear —we reject the word "mistake".

In Syria, the attacks never stop. Doctors in Aleppo pull their weakest patients off ventilators so that someone else can get a chance. But ventilators are made for the weakest cases. This is desperate, desperate medicine. Just this morning, two more hospitals in eastern Aleppo were struck, leading to their temporary shutdown. In one, the intensive care unit was severely damaged. Besieged, our Syrian colleagues are there for the duration. When it is their turn, they will die there, they tell us, with their patients. We deplore the lack of control over hostilities. This free-for-all is a choice. There is a method in the madness. In both Yemen and Syria, four of the five permanent members of the Council are implicated in these attacks.

In an age when counter-terrorism shapes war, a license to kill has been issued. We call on Council members again to revoke that license, whether or not their enemies are receiving the medical care that is attacked, because throwing medical impartiality to the wind is also becoming a new norm of warfare. Military action and humanitarian needs must be balanced. Attacking hospitals and medical workers is a non-negotiable red line. As such, it must be set out — in clear and simple terms — in all military manuals, rules of engagement and standard operating procedures. Too often, unverified intelligence, or opaque claims that a hospital is a command-and-control centre is justification enough for an attack. To stop that, there must be accountability. There must be credible investigations — and not just by the perpetrators.

I deliver this message almost one year to the day that United States forces destroyed the Médecins sans Frontieres hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan. We are still waiting for an independent investigation into how 42 patients, hospital staff and caregivers were killed while simply receiving and providing medical care.

We appeal to the Council to immediately endorse and implement the Secretary-General's recommendations — in particular the call for independent and effective investigations. We also urgently request that the Secretary-General appoint a special representative mandated to document and report attacks on medical facilities, health personnel, and patients. Impunity must end. Only political pressure and accountability will bring that about. In short, the Council must make its resolution operational. Stop bombing hospitals. Stop bombing health workers. Stop bombing patients.

The President: I thank Ms. Liu for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Maurer.

Mr. Maurer: We met in New York exactly 149 days ago for the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), which many of us appreciated for its clarity in language, commitment to international humanitarian law and design of concrete follow-up. In the five months that have passed since then, however, attacks on health care personnel facilities and vehicles have certainly not ceased. The situation in many countries remains deeply alarming.

In Syria, for instance, on all sides of the front lines, health facilities and personnel regularly come under fire or are forced to close due to heavy clashes. Just a few hours ago, the two largest hospitals in Aleppo were reportedly attacked. Patients were killed and medical staff were injured. All across the country, many hospitals are no longer functional, leaving injured people with little hope of getting life-saving medical assistance. The violence, the disruption of the electricity and water supplies, and the lack of medicines have severely jeopardized access to health care.

In Yemen, one-quarter of all health services have reportedly either been destroyed or shut down at a time when there are more injured people than ever. Just over a month ago, a Médecins Sans Frontières supported hospital in Hajjah governorate, Yemen, was hit and 90 people were killed — and that is just a tip of the iceberg. The list continues — Afghanistan, South Sudan, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya and so on. Unfortunately, the trend described previously continues unabatedly. The behaviour of actors on the battlefield has not changed over the past couple of months, nor have belligerents been seen to factor humanitarian consequences more prominently into their military decision-making. Health systems continue to disintegrate under the cumulative impact of violence, leaving millions of people in highly fragile conditions.

Although we have not seen progress on the battlefield, at least here at the United Nations the community of States has resolved to work on this issue. First, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is pleased to see the leadership of the Council reaffirming the continued validity of international humanitarian law as the universally agreed framework for the protection of the wounded and sick and the delivery of medical care in armed conflict. We must remain confident and demonstrate through our actions that, even in the most trying circumstances, international humanitarian law remains relevant and can make a difference for people bearing the brunt of war.

Secondly, specific recommendations and measures for the protection of health care in conflict are now integrated in official resolutions. At the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the resolution to protect health care in armed conflict was unanimously adopted. The Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2286 (2016). Eighty-five countries supported it and we now have a solid foundation from which to promote such measures.

But it is clear that more concrete action is necessary. The ICRC notes with appreciation the letter of the Secretary-General addressed to the States Members of the United Nations (S/2016/722, annex), as a follow-up to resolution 2286 (2016) and delineating a clear road map for implementation. We appreciate having been consulted on the content of the letter and for the opportunity to provide input.

From our perspective, being close to the victims when negotiating humanitarian access with weapons-bearers on all sides and from the information collected through the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's Health care in Danger initiative, we believe that there are four areas where concrete measures must be taken.

First, on legislation, States must strengthen domestic legislation protecting access to health care as is their obligation under international law. They must ensure that national laws recognize the role of first responders, often staff and volunteers from national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. States must do everything in their power to enforce existing legal sanctions so that they act as a deterrent.

Secondly, on data collection, we encourage States and other relevant actors to set up national and international systems to collect and analyse data on the occurrence of violence against health care personnel, facilities, medical transports and patients and convene multi-stakeholder meetings to regularly share challenges and good practices on preventing and addressing acts of violence against the delivery of health care.

Thirdly, on accountability, I ask the Council to ensure that acts of violence against the delivery of health care that amounts to grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions are penalized as such in domestic legal orders. We would like to see the strengthening of capacities to enable full, prompt, impartial, independent and effective investigations, ensuring enhanced accountability and addressing the grievances of victims.

Lastly, on preparedness and prevention, we ask States and other relevant actors to adopt contingency plans. Such plans would be adopted in anticipation of situations that could jeopardize the organization and provision of assistance to the sick and the wounded and to develop practical measures for armed forces to minimize disruptions to health-care services during the planning and conduct of military operations and incorporate them into orders, rules of engagement, training and standard operating procedures and other relevant documents.

I would like to renew ICRC's offer today to build a more constructive relationship of deep operational engagement, feedback, dialogue and corrective measures with all parties to conflicts on the conduct of hostilities. That may eventually help to re-establish trust among belligerents that the law is not only applicable because of the sanctions and accountability processes attached to it, but as a useful and necessary tool in the interest of all. In that regard, let me make the following comment.

I do understand and respect the role of the Council to offer political positions and guidelines with regard to international peace and security. In dealing with the issue of international humanitarian law and its implementation, the Council must still factor into its reflections the importance of trust, confidence and consensus among belligerents that can best be promoted through mutual, impartial and independent intermediaries able to maintain the confidence of the parties to the conflict, as stated in the Geneva Conventions. It is important, therefore, that, while united around the table today, we also understand and respect our roles and responsibilities as political and humanitarian actors.

One hundred and forty nine days ago, the Council took historic measures and your presence here today, Sir, attests to your commitment to the protection of patients and health-care workers everywhere. But meanwhile, men and women, girls and boys, doctors and nurses, continue to run to the basements when they hear planes and rockets approaching. They continue to pull their loved ones out from the rubble of destroyed hospitals. They continue to fear armed men stopping their ambulances. Much stronger engagement is needed to turn our commitment into a reality on the ground, to make a real difference for people suffering in wars. I urge the Council to continue to push.

The President: I thank Mr. Maurer for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the members of the Security Council.

Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2016/722, annex) and for his dedication. I thank Ms. Liu and Mr. Maurer for their respective briefings.

I have listened with the utmost attention to Ms. Liu and have taken on board her proposal that the Secretary-General assign a Special Representative to deal with these issues. I have also listened attentively to my good friend Mr. Maurer regarding his four proposals on legislation, data collection, accountability and the adoption of contingency plans. Above all, I thank them for the outstanding work they are doing for the enormous number of people around the world who are working to save the lives of others, often sacrificing their own lives in the process.

Spain was one of the sponsors of resolution 2286 (2016). When did the idea crop up? The idea arose at a meeting on the humanitarian crisis in Syria at the beginning of the year between Spain, New Zealand and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). That is why today I wished to exercise some self-criticism on the basis of the report of the Secretary-General in order to analyse the role that Security Council members should play and the response that the Council should give as a collective body with regard to attacks on doctors and hospitals.

I would like to begin by expressing our full support for the recommendations of the Secretary-General, which show us the path we should follow to comply with resolution 2286 (2016). Some of those recommendations could have immediate effect on the ground, of which I shall cite two examples. The first is reforming the rules of engagement to prohibit a military presence and the stockpiling of military materiel in the vicinity of hospitals and other medical facilities. The second is the use of new technologies to prevent attacks and, if necessary, to document incidents. We would call upon all Member States to put those measures into practice as a matter of urgency.

Furthermore, I would like to address the role of members of the Council. It is obvious that we have the responsibility to be realistic; we have to accept that attacks on health-care workers during armed conflicts cannot be curbed by a simple resolution. Nevertheless, resolution 2286 (2016) can serve as a basis for a change of culture within the Security Council. Accordingly, members of the Council, particularly those that sponsored the initiative, are especially responsible in this area.

We must bear in mind the need to protect doctors and hospitals in all decisions made by the Council, from the mandates for peacekeeping operations — which we are constantly revising — to the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the dialogues that we have with the Special Envoys of the Secretary-General.

This change of culture also implies maintaining more regular contact with specialized organizations in order to benefit from the exchange of information and to find solutions. As far as Spain is concerned, we are following up on all our activities with the aim of producing a best practices guide for future members of the Security Council. This will be the legacy we leave in this area.

Our first impression during the five months since resolution 2286 (2016) was adopted is that much still remains to be done. We are also part of the Group of Friends of Resolution 2286 (2016), which is already under way in Geneva, and Spain would like to convene a meeting of this Group at least once a year here in New York.

I shall now briefly address the response that should be given by the Security Council regarding the attacks on doctors and hospitals. This is the most important part of what I have to say, and the great unresolved issue of resolution 2286 (2016): we must recognize that we are failing. We are failing the doctors in Aleppo, as we have done this week. We are failing the MSF clinics that had to close down in Yemen last summer, something we have not forgotten. We are failing the patients of the hospitals that have been bombed in South Sudan. We owe them all an answer.

Once again, the Council has the necessary tools at its disposal. What is lacking in the Council is simple, namley, the political will to take action. The report of the Secretary-General refers to various measures — for example, the use of sanctions and referring certain cases to the International Criminal Court. I would like to state clearly that Spain supports those measures, but we also have other, simpler options within our reach. For example, the Council could, if it had the political will, agree to demand a swift, independent, impartial and effective investigation in response to the most serious attacks, as established in resolution 2286 (2016). I am referring to the attack of 19 September and to the attacks that apparently took place this morning in Aleppo. Spain is prepared to contribute human and material resources so that such investigations can be carried out. However, we need the consensus of all 15 members of the Council. This is where we would ask

for special efforts from those that are directly involved in armed conflicts.

Our commitment to resolution 2286 (2016) is devalued every time we fail to act. As Ms. Liu urged the Council on 3 May (see S/PV.7685), let us use this resolution as a tool to save lives, rather than continuing to devalue the work of the Security Council.

Mr. Barro (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): *Allow me to begin by thanking Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing and for the relevant recommendations appended to his letter dated 18 August 2016 (S/2016/722, annex)*. We would also like to thank Ms. Joanne Liu, International President of Médecins Sans Frontières, and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their excellent briefings and the tireless efforts ceaselessly made by their respective organizations on the ground in order to prevent and mitigate attacks committed against medical personnel and facilities in armed conflict zones.

The information we have just received demonstrates — if it was still necessary to do so — the need for the Security Council to undertake the protection of medical personnel, facilities and transport. It is clear that this protection must be respected in times of war. This is why we commend the timeliness of the recommendations on measures to be taken to strengthen the protection of the injured, the sick, medical personnel and humanitarian players, as well as their means of transport, as contained in the aforementioned letter of the Secretary-General. We also endorse the concrete recommendations aimed at preventing acts of violence, attacks and threats against health care in times of armed conflict. In that regard, my delegation backs the idea of that opening investigations into allegations of violations and a commitment to prosecuting the perpetrators of these crimes are essential to strengthening the protection of health care in times of armed conflict.

Furthermore, we believe that the role of United Nations peacekeeping operations needs to be strengthened. This presupposes the need, during the drafting of mandates or the establishment of missions, for capacity-building measures and support for security sector reform and sanctions procedures, and especially to ensure that the resources of peacekeeping operations are commensurate with their mandate. This also presupposes the importance of ensuring that individuals suspected of having committed grave violations of international law relating to the protection of medical care during armed conflicts be brought to justice. It further requires the restoration of basic services, including the reconstruction of medical hospitals or other medical facilities destroyed or damaged during attacks.

In addition to these recommendations of the Secretary-General, we believe that it would be just as relevant to take the following additional measures to counter the attacks and obstructions to access to health care in conflict zones.

First, we must identify all obstacles that prevent access to health care and medical facilities, and to ensure that these obstacles are lifted so as to enable appropriate deployment on the ground.

Secondly, local health-care organizations must be supported so as to ensure that they can provide minimum services thanks to ad hoc solutions that could be identified based on conditions on the ground.

Thirdly, military personnel must receive high-quality training in order to reduce to a minimum disruptions to health-care services, while safeguarding the legitimate security considerations.

Finally, the Security Council must hold debriefing meetings on attacks carried out frequently in specific areas.

In conclusion, I reaffirm Senegal's dedication to the protection of medical personnel and health facilities during armed conflict, an issue that remains at the heart of the Global Health and Foreign Policy initiative of the Oslo Group on Global Health Policy, which our country led in 2015, with the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 63/33 on strengthening the management of international health crises.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Today brought us the terrible news of the death of Shimon Peres, to whom we pay deep and sincere tribute. A couple of hours later, we learned of renewed bombings of hospital installations in Aleppo. It would seem that this is a without end tragedy. The five pages of resolution 2286 (2016) apparently have not been worded strongly enough to protect these hospital installations and medical personnel against these horrendous — and as the Secretary-General has called them — cowardly attacks on hospitals and medical personnel working in them.

We thank the Secretary-General for the recommendations that he has prepared, which my country fully supports. We are also very grateful to the International Committee of the Red Cross, through our friend Mr. Peter Maurer — we have taken very good note of his comments — and to the International President of Médecins Sans Frontières, Ms. Liu. We fully support the proposal to establish a post of special representative of the Secretary-General to investigate attacks on hospitals and hospital staff.

My briefing was going to be somewhat longer, but my colleague Román Oyarzun Marchesi basically read out my speech with his comments. I endorse each and every one of his words. Therefore, the only thing that I will stress in particular is the need and the commitment to investigating and punishing these horrendous acts. All preventive measures are necessary and indispensable, but we must also recall that war crimes must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law and that we must therefore take all measures necessary to ensure that justice is served and the guilty are duly punished.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to thank the Secretary-General, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Mr. Peter Maurer, and the International President of Médecins Sans frontières (MSF) , Ms. Joanne Liu, for their very inspiring, concrete and operational briefings, which reflect a unanimous desire to put an end to attacks against medical facilities and health-care personnel.

Allow me here, on behalf of France, to again pay tribute to the selflessness, courage and exemplary action of MSF and ICRC personnel and of all humanitarian workers working in increasingly difficult conditions, who have now themselves become targets as a result of their dedication to victims. Their work and commitment are a source of inspiration and admiration.

Whether it be in Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan or anywhere else, attacks on health workers have increased over the past few years. The Council had to act, and therefore took up this issue and adopted by consensus resolution 2286 (2016), whose goal is to rapidly strengthen the protection of medical workers and health facilities in conflict zones. I commend in particular the mobilization of the penholders regarding that very important question.

Since the adoption of the resolution, attacks on health workers have continued. The Secretary-General has told the Council that in Syria, eleven hospitals were bombed in August — three in Aleppo, four in Idlib, two in Homs, one in Damascus and another in Darayya. These facilities are now closed. Since mid-July, the eight hospitals that remain open in eastern Aleppo have all been damaged at least once by bombing and shelling — four repeatedly so. Just today, the two largest hospitals in eastern Aleppo were hit by intentional air strikes that temporarily put them out of service. If those are not war crimes, then I honestly do not know what war crimes could possibly be. The Secretary-General — whom I thank on behalf of France — was especially clear on this issue.

In Yemen, the Abs hospital was bombed on 15 August, claiming 19 lives and injuring 24 people and forcing MSF to evacuate its personnel. I could cite numerous other examples.

The Council must follow up on its decisions and has accordingly asked the Secretary-General to submit to it concrete recommendations for the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016). France welcomes the letter (S/2016/722, annex) of the Secretary-General and supports its main recommendations. Similarly, we will give our full consideration to the proposals made by Mr. Peter Maurer and Ms. Joanne Liu.

The increasing attacks against medical facilities and health workers remind us that the principles of humanity enshrined by international humanitarian law need to be applied, strengthened and supported everywhere and in all circumstances. It is a daily struggle. In that regard, France takes this opportunity to call on countries that have not yet done so to ratify the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions.

In addition to the attacks, preventing access to health care is increasingly used by the parties to the conflict as a tool of war. In Syria, the obstruction of the delivery of medical supplies by the authorities continues despite the commitments they have undertaken, and more than 8,000 kits were removed from convoys in August. Access to humanitarian assistance, in particular to medical supplies, must be the norm and not the exception.

Lastly, the protection of medical personnel cannot be effective without fighting impunity. The attacks against hospitals, medical facilities and medical personnel are war crimes. Those responsible must be

brought to justice. Faced with the increasing number of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, impartial and independent investigations to determine the facts are indispensable. That demand to determine the truth will enable Security Council members to come together in carrying out effective and resolute actions. As members knows, France will remain particularly vigilant and fully mobilized in this literally vital role.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Maurer and Ms. Liu for their very moving briefings. The United States deeply appreciates the life-saving work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), and we commend their unstinting efforts to treat the sick and the wounded in the world's most brutal and dangerous places. We also pay tribute to all of their staff members who have made the ultimate sacrifice in their determination to help others.

As we all know, the creation of the Red Cross and the norms enshrined in the Geneva Convention can be traced back to June 1859, when the businessman Henry Dunant was so disturbed by a battle between France and Austria that he began a movement for the humane treatment of the wounded in conflict. In his book *A Memory of Solferino*, Dunant recalled a scene of the battle that inspired him to push for change. He wrote,

> "[the] guns crash over the dead and wounded, strewn pell-mell on the ground. Brains spurt under the wheels, limbs are broken and torn, bodies mutilated beyond recognition — the soil is literally puddled with blood, and the plain littered with human remains".

That was 1859. But let us consider the scene today in eastern Aleppo in 2016. Early this morning, contacts inside eastern Aleppo told us — as members of the Security Council have already heard — that two hospitals were reportedly hit by air strikes and shells, killing two patients and injuring many medical staff. There are obviously very limited options for medical care for the trapped civilians of eastern Aleppo. One medical worker told a journalist this week that non-stop bombing in eastern Aleppo means that "hospitals have no more room to receive even one more case". A radiologist said that they are running short of drugs and respirators, and do not have baby milk, especially for newborns. Another doctor, Dr. Ahmed — who was so afraid of being targeted that he did not wish to use his full name — told a reporter that "we are carrying out a large number of amputations just so that patients can survive, because otherwise we do not have the means to treat them". Many of the wounded, he continued, are dying before the doctors' eyes. They feel helpless.

In the streets of eastern Aleppo, people are frantically digging through the rubble, as we have seen, with their bare hands to find members of their families and their children because there are not enough first responders. There is not enough rescue equipment to go around. The people of eastern Aleppo are literally dying in their streets. They are maimed and wounded by air strikes carried out by Russia and the Al-Assad regime, and they are unable to receive treatment because of the medieval siege that Russia and the Syrian regime have imposed. The plains of Dunant's Solferino have become the thoroughfares of eastern Aleppo.

We must not become inured to these atrocities as Russia and the regime carry out this new offensive. We cannot forget that the tactics used in eastern Aleppo are the very same ones that the Al-Assad regime patented years ago and has deployed throughout Syria, systematically removing medical supplies from assistance convoys, denying medical evacuations, bombing hospitals to pieces and killing first responders in unconscionable double-tap attacks. Since 2011, the highly respected group, Physicians for Human Rights has documented 382 attacks on 269 medical facilities in Syria. Not one week goes by without another report of a hospital having been struck. The actions of the Al-Asaad regime and Russia are contrary to the demands of resolution 2286 (2016), which we unanimously adopted only five months ago.

This campaign against health-care sites and medical workers in Syria must end. The protection of medical facilities and personnel, as well as humanitarian personnel, continues to be eroded in conflicts around the world. In South Sudan, one of the world's most dangerous countries for aid workers, in August alone the United Nations recorded 64 incidents of violence against humanitarian workers and the equipment that they use to deliver care. Last February, an attack on the protection of civilians site in Malakal destroyed an international corps and medical facility, and killed two MSF staff. Humanitarian organizations have recorded the parties to the conflict killing patients, torching clinics, stealing medicine and threatening medical staff. At a minimum, Council members and countries in the region need to use whatever channels of influence

that they have available to insist that all parties to the conflict in South Sudan stop this violence against humanitarian and medical personnel immediately.

In Yemen, the United States shares the grave concern that MSF has expressed with regard to the attacks that have struck its medical facilities. The United Nations has verified 59 attacks affecting hospitals in Yemen in 2015 by all parties. The United States has engaged the Saudi-led coalition to emphasize the imperative of the need to take all feasible precautions to avoid harm or, in any even, minimize harm to civilians and civilian objects. We have stressed that unacceptable strikes on schools, hospitals and other civilian objects must stop, and we call on the coalition to publicly release the results of the investigations that it has launched into such incidents.

We also call on the Houthis and their allies to cease the indiscriminate launch of rockets against Saudi Arabia and the shelling of civilian areas within Yemen, causing numerous civilian casualties. All parties need to comply with international humanitarian law. To alleviate suffering, the United States urges the parties to commit to an immediate cessation of hostilities, enabling humanitarian needs to be addressed without fear of attack.

Many have also criticized the United States for the erroneous air strike on an MSF hospital in Kunduz a year ago. We accept responsibility for the strike and we have repeatedly expressed our deepest regret for it. The United States Department of Defense took full responsibility, conducted a full and transparent investigation and made the results of that investigation publically known. We have since taken steps to learn from Kunduz in order to minimize the likelihood of any future incidents.

Moreover, in July President Obama released an executive order on United States policy on pre- and post-strike measures to address civilian casualties in United States operations involving the use of force. The policy is the first of its kind. The executive order commits every component of the United States Government to work together towards the goal of reducing civilian casualties and to be transparent and learn from them when they do occur. The United States also works actively with the ICRC and non-governmental organizations to refine how we distinguish between combatants and civilians. The United States will continue to do all it can to reduce civilian casualties and to be transparent about how we meet that goal.

Let me conclude by focusing on the human consequences of attacks on and obstruction and interference in health care in armed conflict. When people are denied health care today, the consequences will be felt long, long after current conflicts end. In Nigeria, for example, vaccines are not being delivered to areas of fighting between the Government and Boko Haram. The result is that polio has re-emerged as a threat to Nigerian children, with two cases discovered last month. Polio is a disease that was cured in the 1950s. The vaccine is easy to administer and is very inexpensive. But every single day that vaccines cannot be delivered, more and more Nigerian children are at risk of lifelong disability or death, so a new generation will certainly feel the consequences of the conflict.

So much changes when the children in a conflict zone are able to access the medical care they desperately need. Last November, a sniper in eastern Aleppo shot six-year-old Shaima in the face, blinding her. However, unlike so many children who are now besieged in eastern Aleppo, Shaima was able to get out of the city in November. She told her father, "It is okay that the sniper hit me — I am not sad. God meant it to be this way and I know I will get better". Miraculously, with the help of doctors in Turkey, Shaima was able to survive and one day she may even be able to see again, once her family raises enough money for an eye operation. Shaima went through an unspeakable horror, but access to medical care will give her a future. As Shaima told a reporter, "I just want to go back to school. I know I will be there soon".

Fellow Council members, we must all do more for the children in Syria, Yemen, South Sudan, Nigeria and in so many other conflict areas — for the children who need that same chance.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Ms. Joanne Liu, International President of Médecins Sans Frontières, for their very comprehensive briefings. We pay tribute to the role of those two organizations in conflict areas. We appreciate the work of all medical personnel and practitioners and thank them for their sacrifice, especially in the light of the dangers they face on a daily basis.

Early in the Egyptian presidency, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Its elected members wanted the Security Council to rise to that challenge and confront the problems faced by health-care personnel in armed conflict. The obstruction of the delivery of assistance to those in need poses an unprecedented challenge that threatens the very foundations of international law, international humanitarian law and, of course, the principle of the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

Resolution 2286 (2016) enjoyed broad consensus, backed by nearly 85 States. However, it did not change a great deal in terms of the reality on the ground. It has not at all alleviated the horrors experienced by health-care personnel working in conflict zones throughout the world. We take note of the recommendations made by the Secretary-General (S/2016/722, annex) concerning measures to be taken to strengthen the protection of the wounded and sick, health-care personnel, hospitals and other medical facilities, in keeping with paragraph 13 of resolution 2286 (2016).

At the same time, however, we affirm once more that those recommendations must be implemented impartially and in a depoliticized way. It is also important to avoid any divisive initiatives that did not enjoy consensus during the negotiations that resulted in resolution 2286 (2016). Egypt strongly supports the very noble values of international humanitarian law, which aim to strengthen the protection of medical facilities and health-care personnel, especially in light of the current challenges facing the medical sector in conflict areas.

Egypt therefore backs the three main axes upon which the Secretary-General has based his recommendations regarding the protection of the injured, the sick and health-care personnel, as well as that of hospitals and other medical facilities. We also support his recommendations regarding the responsibility of those who perpetrate attacks against the aforementioned individuals. We believe that it is necessary to prevent further attacks and will spare no effort to ensure that we achieve the objectives of resolution 2286 (2016), in order to provide greater security to the sick, the injured and health-care personnel in areas of armed conflict.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Ms. Joanne Liu, International President of Médecins Sans Frontières, for their valuable briefings. We would like to echo the urgent call to those participating in conflicts that they stop bombing hospitals, health-care workers and patients. We would like to express our thanks to and recognition for the thousands of medical health workers, many of whom are working anonymously but who are putting their lives on the line every day to fulfil their noble task of saving lives and alleviating human suffering in the cruel situation of those conflicts. The work of humanitarian workers is an extraordinary example of humanity and hope for peoples who are so deeply affected by the violence and the horror. Attacking health-care workers is a barbarity that cannot be justified under any circumstances.

Once again, we welcome the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), which represents a timely political response to the systematic and serious violations of international humanitarian law that are taking place on a daily basis in the ongoing armed conflicts that have led to so much bloodshed in various parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. What we now have to do is to comply honestly, straight-forwardly and without excuses with the mandate and purposes of the resolution.

It is difficult for us to understand how it is possible that, at a time when high-tech satellite- or laser-guided weapons are capable of killing at any distance with terrifying precision, such mistakes could be made and that concentrated bombings are targeted on medical facilities and personnel in areas of armed conflict, despite the fact that hospitals are public facilities, whose locations are well known by all parties to the conflict, and where there are early-warning protocols in place to avoid bombing situations. We cannot understand how such things can be happening and how people can keep claiming that they are simply mistakes. We therefore repudiate the attacks that have taken place against medical and humanitarian staff and facilities and means of transport in Palestine, Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria.

For us, it is unacceptable that Médecins Sans Frontières, the Red Cross and other health-care workers and humanitarian convoys of the United Nations have become military targets in war-torn areas. That is something that we cannot tolerate — that hospitals are being bombed and that doctors, the wounded and the sick are being killed those hospitals.

It seems that for very many people life does not have any value. We are seeing conflicts that are taking humankind back to times where there were no rules. Such violations not only endanger the well-being and security of millions of people, but they also worsen crises and represent an enormous challenge for humanitarian and health-care workers. It is increasingly difficult for them to carry out their humanitarian work.

We believe that we must all make a special effort to ensure that the situation is resolved and that the Security Council plays its crucial role in that regard. We fully endorse the Secretary-General's recommendations of 8 August 2016, formulated in accordance with paragraph 13 of resolution 2286 (2016), and we decisively support the proposal that was made today by Ms. Liu to the Council.

We believe that it is imperative that all countries adhere to international treaties as they pertain to the protection of health-care workers and facilities in armed conflicts and that national legislative frameworks be strengthened. We also think that peacekeeping operations and special political missions of the United Nations should play a more active role in the creation of an environment conducive to the protection of health-care workers and facilities. We also believe that both United Nations missions and the Member States that are able to bring influence to bear on the parties have the obligation to advocate for respect for, and the full implementation of, international humanitarian law.

There need to be greater efforts to document and analyse all incidents that affect the security and well-being of health-care workers and facilities and ensure that impartial, independent and prompt investigations are carried out and that those who are suspected of perpetrating such acts are brought to justice. Reparations must be provided to the victims of the damage caused.

Finally, my country, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, has never attacked any other country. We have never participated in any military coalition. Nor do we have double standards on that issue. We also do not have double standards when it comes to bombing humanitarian workers in particular. We do not justify some attacks and remain silent on others. We do not denounce some and use others for political purposes. Nor do we sell weapons to anyone or, much worse, spend billions of dollars on the terrifying weapons of death. That is to say that we have all the political moral and ethical force to call upon countries that participate in conflicts to cease the killing and violence against humanitarian workers, and we, as a member of the Security Council, will do everything necessary to ensure that the horrors of war that we are seeing in these meetings are at least brought under control. The most important thing is for us to achieve peace and for the extraordinary health-care workers to be able to continue to be deployed and do their magnificent work in favour of life and human beings.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China commends the initiative taken by New Zealand to convene this meeting on the protection of medical personnel and facilities in armed conflict. I wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing. China has listened carefully to the statements by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer, and the representative of Médecins Sans Frontières, Ms. Joanne Liu.

Last May, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2286 (2016), which calls upon the parties to armed conflicts to enhance the protection of medical personnel and facilities in armed conflict. This underscores the importance that the international community attaches to the question of the protection of medical personnel and facilities in armed conflict. China pays tribute medical personnel and the relevant humanitarian agencies for their humanitarian spirit in healing the wounded and rescuing the dying in extremely harsh conditions and at the risk of their own safety. I would like to make the following points.

First, emphasis should be put on promoting political processes to resolve regional hotspot issues. Only by ending conflict will it be possible once and for all to eliminate security threats to medical personnel and medical facilities. The Security Council should actively work to promote dialogue and negotiations and facilitate efforts by the parties to conflict to end them and resolve their differences through dialogue and negotiations, thereby eliminating conflicts. The international community should also adhere to a fair and objective stance and play a constructive role in promoting political solutions, so as to create favourable conditions for protecting the safety and security of medical personnel and facilities during armed conflicts.

Secondly, it is incumbent upon the Governments concerned and the parties to the conflict to protect medical personnel and facilities in armed conflicts. The Governments concerned bear the primary responsibility

for protecting civilians within their borders, and they should therefore strengthen their measures to protect medical personnel and facilities. The countries concerned should investigate, in accordance with the law, violent acts, including attacks against and threats to medical personnel and facilities in armed conflicts. Parties to a conflict should adhere to international humanitarian law and abide by Council resolutions and fulfil their duty to protect and allow access to humanitarian assistance. The international community should provide support and assistance on the basis of full consultations with the countries concerned.

Thirdly, humanitarian operations must win the understanding and trust of the parties concerned. In armed conflicts, as medical personnel and humanitarian agencies carry out operations in the discharge of their medical duties, they must adhere to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries concerned; adhere to impartiality, fairness and independence; follow guiding humanitarian principles and avoid getting involved in conflicts. Such practices will help to protect medical personnel and facilities in armed conflict.

Fourthly, the United Nations and humanitarian agencies should work in synergy to protect medical personnel and facilities. The United Nations should conduct an in-depth study and comprehensive assessment of humanitarian risks and challenges in armed conflicts. On the basis of the views of the countries concerned, it should establish effective mechanisms for communicating with medical personnel and humanitarian agencies and engage in the timely exchange of information concerning the situation on the ground, so as to establish conditions favourable to the protection of humanitarian efforts, medical personnel and their facilities. On their part, medical personnel and relevant agencies also need to exercise their own awareness of risks and enhance their own safety and protection.

Mr. Ibrahim (Malaysia): I join others in thanking Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his participation in this important meeting, convened pursuant to resolution 2286 (2016), which Malaysia strongly supports.

I also wish to join other sponsors of that resolution and Council members in expressing special thanks and appreciation for the participation of Mr. Peter Maurer and Ms. Joanne Liu, representing the esteemed organizations the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), respectively. Their briefings provided a harrowing glimpse into the daily struggles and increasing challenges and risks faced by health-care providers in situations of armed conflict. We pay our deepest respects and highest tribute to those health-care providers who risk their lives and selflessly devote themselves to this noble cause.

Documented evidence of attacks, deliberate or otherwise, on the wounded and the sick, medical personnel and health facilities across many ongoing conflict areas underscores the grim reality that international humanitarian law has been wilfully ignored and, in some cases flagrantly violated on multiple occasions by belligerent parties. Resolution 2286 (2016), as Ms. Liu noted, has failed to change anything on the ground. Therefore, the Council now has the obligation to evaluate and mainstream the Secretary-General's recommendations (see S/2016/722, annex) on measures to prevent acts of violence against the wounded and sick, as well as health-care personnel, in situations of armed conflict. We see today's meeting as an important small step towards realizing that commitment. That is an urgent and priority task for the Council.

As an illustration, despite the 9 September ceasefire agreement reached by Russia and the United States, health-care providers and facilities in Syria continue to be targeted. In addition, the challenges faced by medical personnel seeking to treat victims are enormous and compounded as the attacks and fighting escalate. Just two days ago in Aleppo, a hospital was struck during an air assault on the area. More than a week ago, an Aleppo-bound 31-truck humanitarian convoy carrying medical supplies, among other things, was also attacked.

Unfortunately, Syria is not the sole conflict where there is an abhorrent lack of respect for the principle of medical neutrality. As Ms. Liu clearly mentioned, the conflict in Yemen has also seen attacks against fully functioning hospitals as recently as mid-August. We regret to learn that, due to escalating hostilities against medical facilities, the situation has become so untenable that MSF was forced to withdraw from six hospitals in northern Yemen.

That disturbing situation merits deeper, urgent concentration and response through concrete actions that go further than mere condemnation. To that end, the

Secretary-General's recommendations should provide a guiding framework. As a first step, the Council should muster the will to implement recommendations on the need for a full, prompt, impartial, independent and effective investigation into attacks against health-care systems in situations of armed conflict. As attacks against medical personnel and facilities in many conflict situations continue unabated, the establishment of an international fact-finding mission or recourse to the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission, in line with the Geneva Convention, to investigate allegations of those serious violations would allow us to pursue accountability and deliver justice.

Impunity will only compound the atrocities committed against health care. Malaysia therefore reaffirms its support for both resolution 2286 (2016) and the Secretary-General's recommendations, which call for investigations into all allegations of violations, as well as taking measures against the perpetrators. All perpetrators must be held accountable.

Before I conclude, my delegation would like to pay tribute to the fallen medical personnel devoted to saving others and to express our gratitude to the noble role played by those who continue to do so under dangerous and trying circumstances. As we seek to shield the very persons protecting the civilians at large, the protection of medical personnel and health facilities should be high on the Council's agenda. The Security Council must persist in defending and protecting the safety of medical personnel and health facilities in situations of armed conflict — an undertaking to which Malaysia is fully committed.

Mr. Gaspar Martins (Angola): We welcome and thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and his clear recommendations (S/2016/722, annex) for the protection of civilians and of health-care workers and facilities in armed conflicts and for his compelling call on the parties to conflicts to strictly uphold and implement them.

We also thank Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Ms. Joanne Liu, International President of Médecins Sans Frontières, for their very enlightened briefings this morning and for bringing here to the Council the real situations that persist in a number of parts of our common globe, to which we must pay special attention.

Angola is deeply concerned by the prevalence of attacks on health-care workers and medical facilities in conflict zones, with a devastating impact on people in need of health care and humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian access remains a key challenge as the parties to conflicts deliberately obstruct the delivery of assistance to civilians trapped in conflict zones. Attacks against humanitarian and health-care workers and facilities, their means of transport and equipment; the arbitrary denial of humanitarian access; bureaucratic restrictions; interference in the delivery of assistance; and depriving civilians of their means of survival are flagrant violations of international humanitarian law set down in the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, its Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005, as well as the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel and its Optional Protocol. Moreover, such acts of violence exacerbate the conflicts and undermine the Security Council's efforts, as mandated by the United Nations charter. South Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen are some of the instances where vital humanitarian supplies are looted, damaged or destroyed, prolonging the population's suffering and the conflicts themselves.

Regrettably, and despite the robust normative frameworks set out in several resolutions and presidential statements issued by the Security Council, especially the unanimously adopted resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, we continue to witness constant violations of these principles. Angola condemns all attacks against humanitarian and health-care personnel and facilities, and urges the parties to conflicts to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. We repudiate the prevailing impunity for violations and abuses committed against medical and humanitarian personnel. Parties to conflicts bear the primary responsibility for meeting the basic needs of the civilians under their control, and we agree with the Secretary-General's assessment that humanitarian organizations must be able to engage systematically with all parties to conflicts in order to secure and maintain humanitarian access and alleviate the human suffering of those trapped in conflict.

Resolution 2286 (2016) conveyed a strong signal on the rejection of such violations of international humanitarian law. The Secretary-General's recommendations are an extremely important tool to put an end to that scourge. We call for their implementation by all relevant actors. The Council cannot continue to meet and simply listen to the appeals and descriptions of

the prevailing situations in different parts of the world, especially when called to briefings by the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières. We must act, and the time for action is now. It is even late — we must act.

Mr. Okamura (Japan): Mr. President, I thank you for convening this meeting. I would also like to convey my gratitude to the Secretary-General; to Ms. Liu, International President of Médecins Sans Frontières; and Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their briefings and, of course, their appeal to the Security Council.

Even in times of peace and stability, medical facilities and medical care save lives every day, but in the context of armed conflict, access to medical care becomes an immediate life-or-death concern for all innocent civilians caught in the grips of war. Hospitals represent the last, and sometimes only, hope for survival for those that are injured. Attacks on medical facilities threaten or even dash that hope.

We believe that attacks on medical facilities for strategic purposes are malicious, beyond human decency and absolutely unacceptable. In service of that belief, Japan took the lead, along with Egypt, New Zealand, Spain and Uruguay, in drafting and ensuring the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016) in May. The adoption of the resolution by consensus demonstrated the firm commitment of the Security Council to ensuring that medical facilities are fully protected and secured, even under combat.

However, as briefed by the representatives of Médecins Sans Frontières and the International Committee of the Red Cross earlier, attacks against medical facilities have continued in those conflict areas even after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016). The lives of medical workers remain under threat, and their deaths continue. We share our grief and anger with Médecins Sans Frontières and the International Committee of the Red Cross. We would like to express our profound respect for the courage and devotion of all medical staff working in the field during the conflict.

We thank those who helped draft the Secretary-General's recommendations to the Council, detailing various practical measures. Japan would like to once again urge all parties to armed conflict to take concrete actions in furtherance of the recommendations before us and the briefings delivered today, in order to protect medical care in armed conflict. I fully agree with the Ambassador of Malaysia in believing that one of the main factors behind the failure to prevent the recurrence of attacks against medical facilities is the lack of accountability. When such attacks are conducted, the facts of the attack are difficult to ascertain, different sides of the conflict cast blame on each other, no thorough investigation is ever conducted and therefore, ultimately, accountability cannot be enforced.

In that context, I would like to draw the Council's attention to the Secretary-General's recommendations. Recommendation 11 indicates that Member States

> "should develop protocols and processes to ensure full, prompt, impartial, independent and effective investigations into allegations of serious violations of international law relating to the protection of medical care in armed conflict." (*S/2016/722, annex, para. 28*)

The recommendation goes on to state that

> "[w]hen Member States fail to carry out such investigations, the Security Council should consider establishing international fact-finding missions or commissions of inquiry, or have recourse to the International Humanitarian Fact Finding Commission established pursuant to Article 90 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions." (*ibid., para. 30*)

It further reads that

> "Member States and parties to armed conflicts should provide support to, and facilitate the work of, fact-finding missions" (*ibid., para. 31*).

Here, Japan emphasizes the important role of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission in ensuring the objective and fair application of international humanitarian law. Hence, Japan has contributed and will continue to contribute to that body, both financially and with personnel. Here, I would like to underline that the Security Council should play an active role in fact-finding and ensuring accountability in that regard. Japan is determined to collaborate with the United Nations and all the parties concerned on that issue.

Mr. Fesko (Ukraine): During our meeting in May when the momentous resolution 2286 (2016) was adopted, Ms. Liu said that we should make the resolution save lives (see S/PV.7685). We could not agree more. Yet, now in September, we must admit that the goal is

still out of reach. Tragically, Syria is the worst example of attacks against medical facilities. According to the World Health Organization, almost every day hospitals, clinics and ambulances are being targeted in that country. So far in September there have been two especially hideous attacks against medical facilities in Syria: one on a humanitarian convoy, on 19 September, and another one the very next day on a medical mobile unit in an opposition-controlled area of Aleppo. This morning we learned of yet another bombing, that of two hospitals that provide badly needed services to the people of eastern Aleppo. Frankly, we are speechless. We join the call made by other delegations around this table on the Syrian regime and its Russian ally to stop these barbaric acts.

In Yemen, medical facilities have also become a frequent target of airstrikes. Unfortunately, the situation is not much different in Afghanistan, where in the past three months alone there have been eight attacks against health-care facilities.

It is against this appalling backdrop that we must urgently consider how to make resolution 2286 (2016) work. In this regard, we took note of the recommendation of the Secretary-General to enhance the protection of medical and humanitarian personnel.

We would like to emphasize that international humanitarian and human rights law has sufficient provisions providing legal protection to medical and humanitarian personnel and related facilities. Nevertheless, quite often these provisions are not respected and are violated by parties to armed conflict.

In that light, we would like to underline the following recommendations made by the Secretary-General.

First, there must be enhanced documentation of acts of violence against medical personnel and facilities in armed conflict. The collection and public recording of data on attacks on health services is a key element in developing an effective preventive system. Thus we would like to echo the recommendation of the Secretary-General to Member States that they enhance their support for United Nations monitoring and data-collection efforts.

Secondly, we must ensure that independent and effective investigations are carried out into serious violations of international law against medical personnel and facilities in armed conflict.

In this regard, we deem it necessary to hold Security Council briefings on country situations where medical care is under attack. Such briefings should, in our view, include information on the investigative steps that the relevant Member States have taken. In addition, the recommendation to the Council on the possible establishment of international fact-finding missions or commissions of inquiry deserve our most careful consideration.

Thirdly, we must ensure accountability for acts of violence against medical care in armed conflict.

It is of the utmost importance that those responsible for such war crimes be held accountable. We share the view that where domestic accountability mechanisms are insufficient, Member States should cooperate fully with existing international criminal justice institutions, including the International Criminal Court, to combat impunity and to ensure respect for international humanitarian law.

Mr. Zagaynov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Secretary-General and to the briefers for their participation in this meeting.

The issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict unfortunately continues to be an urgent one. We share the briefers' concerns about the reports of casualties among civilians and humanitarian and medical personnel. We are very grateful for the selfless work of the doctors who risk their own lives to carry out their professional duties in conflict zones. We are exceedingly concerned about attacks on medical facilities and personnel and condemn them firmly. The circumstances of such events require careful, independent investigation. Mindful of the special significance of medical facilities and the danger their personnel face during conflict, our delegation supported the adoption in May of resolution 2286 (2016). We are carefully studying the recommendations of the Secretary-General in that regard in the expectation of a detailed discussion of them and we hope to get some clarification on the questions we have about them.

At this stage, we would like to make a few general comments. The primary responsibility for the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and others who are entitled to special international protection in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, lies with every party to an armed conflict. They must make every possible effort to avoid the death of civilians, including medical personnel, in order to abide by

international humanitarian law. Clearly, that does not cover situations in which medical personnel suffer at the hands of those who are supposed to protect them. To deal with that, Member States and United Nations and humanitarian organizations should mobilize additional efforts aimed at strengthening the mechanisms for providing security to medical facilities and their personnel in armed conflict.

Against the backdrop of today's information wars, in considering this issue every United Nations body should operate using verified information that is not open to doubt. It is important to ensure that the Secretary-General's reports submitted in response to Security Council resolution 2286 (2016) include only reliable information.

Lastly, we consider it essential to approach the problem of ensuring the safety of medical personnel in the context of the protection of civilians generally, without creating any sort of hierarchy among the various categories.

Today a lot has been said, and said very emotionally, about the tragedy of the citizens of Syria and the conditions in which medical workers have to operate there. The suffering of the country's civilian population must be stopped. There was a real chance of achieving that in the Russian-United States agreements of 9 September. Our approach to what is going on in Syria at the moment, as well as to countering the terrorist groups that are firmly established on its territory, has been laid out in detail in the Security Council meetings held on 22 and 25 September (see S/PV.7775 and S/PV.7777, respectively), as well as in other formats. We will not repeat it all again but will focus on the following points.

It has already become a sort of tradition that the majority of strikes on civilian targets in Syria are indiscriminately — by default, as it were — blamed on Damascus and Russia. That trend has continued today. In zones of conflict, including the Middle East, similarly unacceptable incidents have been a natural consequence of the policies of destabilization of the United States, with the support of its allies. Hospitals have been reduced to rubble as a result of strikes by the Americans or their allies.

We all recall the tragedy of the bombing of the Médecins Sans Frontières hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, in October 2015. The coalition in Yemen has destroyed civilian infrastructure, including medical facilities, and the United States has given direct assistance to that through its air force. Some European capitals have generously supplied that coalition with arms. From time to time, the pressure of the facts produces admissions and apologies. In the case of the deadly attack American air attack in Kunduz in particular, there were investigations and disciplinary proceedings, and improvements were made in the air force's operational guidelines. But what does that really mean? None of the military personnel involved were convicted; they continued to serve. According to the information in the media, the compensation paid to the families of the victims was merely symbolic. Regarding the operating improvements for the air force that I mentioned, we have to ask how they resulted in the alleged mistakes made in the United States-led coalition's bombardment of Syrian army positions in the city of Deir ez-Zor, the strikes on the city of Manbij on 19 July, where almost 100 civilians died, according to reports, and the attack on 28 July on the town of Al-Ghandoura.

Within the Syrian conflict there has been a persistent desire to supersede the Government at any price and to redraw the geopolitical map of the region. At one point there was a possibility to prevent the start of this conflict, and there has been more than one chance to end it and reach a political settlement, to which there can be no alternative. However, instead of seeking a collective solution, the representatives of the States directly responsible for fanning the flames of the war in Syria prefer to rehearse endless anti-Russian fabrications in the Security Council and in other forums. What we are hearing in the media now is nothing but speculation that exploits people's suffering for propaganda purposes and to divert attention from their own failed policies.The information is often based on unreliable data from neighbourhoods under the control of armed groups that have a direct interest in discrediting the activities of the Syrian Government and Russia. The work with so-called witnesses is frequently done in Syria's neighbouring States and falsified information is spread.

For our part, we urge the rejection of provocative rhetoric and that we put all our efforts into bringing an end to the conflict in Syria as quickly as possible. We already have a good basis on which to work, including through the Russian-American collaborative effort.

Mr. Wilson (United Kingdom): I would like to thank the Secretary-General for the clarity of his briefing

and for sharing his recommendations with us today. These ideas will help us protect and prevent attacks on medical personnel and their places of work. The United Kingdom welcomes this important contribution.

At the outset, I want to pay tribute to Ms. Joanne Liu and Mr. Peter Mauer from Médecins Sans frontières and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), respectively. I want to highlight one thing each of them said to us. Ms. Liu told us that throwing medical impartiality to the wind is becoming a new form of warfare. Mr. Mauer said that we must show that international humanitarian law remains relevant for people bearing the brunt of war. That is a wake up call for the Council. He and his colleagues are carrying out vital work, so often in the most harrowing of conditions and so often at great risk to themselves.

Sadly, five months since the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), the overwhelming dangers facing Médecins Sans Frontières, the International Committee of the Red Cross and others operating in conflict zones are still painfully apparent. Despite resolution 2286 (2016) and despite the clear protections provided under international humanitarian law, medical workers continue to be injured and killed as they work to save the lives of others in Syria, in Yemen in South Sudan, in all the countries Mr. Mauer listed and in so many places around the world.

But let us be honest here — the most starkly this is on display is in Aleppo. This is not a propaganda point; it is a fact. We have just heard today about air strikes against the two largest remaining hospitals in rebel-held eastern Aleppo. That is a fact. We, the Council, cannot hide behind the passive voice. We need to be clear. The only air forces caring out strikes in eastern Aleppo are the Syrian and Russian air forces. That is also a fact.

As the Secretary-General said just now, those using ever more destructive weapons know that they are committing war crimes. Aleppo is now a city that is synonymous with suffering. It is a city synonymous with medics working by the lights of their phones with only the most basic supplies. It is a city synonymous with rubble, dust and unrelenting bombardment — a sickening test bed for even crueller, even more barbaric weapons. Syria and Russia bear full responsibility for these atrocities.

And yet this is just the tip of the iceberg. While 400,000 people have died as a direct result of the conflict, the secondary death toll, as a result of the destruction of the health-care system, will be much higher. Access to vaccinations, neonatal care, maternal health care, women's health care — all these things have all but disappeared. Once extinct diseases like polio have returned and measles, typhoid, hepatitis and tuberculosis are now reaching dangerous levels. In cities like Madaya, we hear heartbreaking stories like that of Ghina Ahmad Wadi, who was shot by a regime sniper last month. For over two weeks the regime denied her medical evacuation before she eventually received the attention she needed. Why? Together with the forced removal of medical supplies from convoys, such actions amount to amount to a calculated dismantling of Syria's health-care system.

Our concern also extends to Yemen. 40 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Improving access to them is a top priority for the United Kingdom. We call on all sides to improve the flow of essential medical and humanitarian supplies to alleviate the suffering. We also take very seriously reports of violations of international humanitarian law in Yemen, including attacks on medical facilities. All sides must conduct thorough and conclusive investigations into all incidents where it is alleged that international humanitarian law has been breached.

Wherever in the world international humanitarian law is breached and whomever by, we must ensure accountability. We owe it to the people of Aleppo and to countless more around the world. To do so, it is clear that we need to gather the evidence and collect the data to bring this about. We welcome the Secretary-General's drawing attention to this in his recommendations. Groups like Da'esh, which conduct sickening attacks on medical workers and facilities are no exception. That is why our Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson, announced last week that the United Kingdom, alongside Iraq, will bring a proposal to the United Nations calling on the Organization to gather and preserve evidence of Da'esh's crimes in Iraq. We did so because there can be no impunity. We therefore support the Secretary-General's recommendation that where domestic accountability mechanisms are insufficient or inadequate, international accountability mechanisms should be sought, including the International Criminal Court.

I want to conclude by once again stressing the importance of international humanitarian law. Where there is armed conflict, civilians and those who

provide medical assistance must be protected. I am proud to reaffirm the United Kingdom's commitment to upholding these laws. I urge all Council members to follow suit.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of New Zealand.

I want to begin by thanking the Secretary-General, Ms. Liu and Mr. Maurer for their briefings, and I want to underline the gravity of the messages they have conveyed to the Council.

We adopted resolution 2286 (2016) in May with a degree of optimism and a strong sense of unanimity. Eighty-five countries sponsored the resolution, making it one of the most widely sponsored Security Council resolutions ever. As one of the drafters, New Zealand hoped the strong message it sent about the need to protect health-care workers and facilities in times of armed conflict would be heeded where it most matters — in the conflicts that are currently on the agenda of the Council. The past few months have been more than dispiriting.

As we have heard, attacks against medical workers and facilities and against the humanitarian convoys delivering medical supplies, have increased since the adoption of the resolution. As others have reminded us, these attacks are taking place in various places around the world, but for frequency and ferocity Yemen and especially Syria are in classes of their own. In Yemen, indiscriminate attacks, including the deadly attack on the hospital in August, resulted in Médecins Sans Frontières having to withdraw support from six hospitals in northern Yemen. The result has been increased suffering and deaths of innocent Yemenis.

Syria is the most dangerous country in the world for health-care workers, largely as a result of the actions of the Syrian Government. We have seen a clear pattern of systematic targeting of hospitals, clinics and ambulances, obstructing health workers and confiscating life-saving medicines and equipment. It has been reported that all hospitals in eastern Aleppo have been subject to military attacks and are only partially functioning as a result. As we have reported today, there have been two more attacks on hospitals in eastern Aleppo overnight.

The apparently deliberate attack last week on a humanitarian convoy near Aleppo represented a new low for a conflict that has been characterized by flagrant violations of international humanitarian law. Like so many other recent attacks on healthcare and humanitarian workers, it probably constitutes a war crime. Such attacks show that some Member States of this Organization are willing to deliberately breach or show reckless disregard for international law in order to achieve their military and political ends. That charge applies both to those that carry out such attacks and to those who ally themselves with such states. Such behaviour is utterly unacceptable.

The Secretary-General's letter (S/2016/722, annex) provides recommendations that we fully support. If followed, they will help operationalize the measures contained in resolution 2286 (2016), which reflect well-established and long-standing rules of international humanitarian law. I wish to highlight several that deserve particular attention.

First, States can and should do more to ensure that international legal frameworks relating to the protection of medical care in armed conflict are reflected in domestic law, as well as in relevant rules of engagement, military manuals and other operational guidelines. Compliance with international humanitarian law is not discretionary. It is as binding on States as any other rule of international law.

Secondly, States must promote understanding of international humanitarian law within their armed forces through regular training and the enforcement of military discipline.

Thirdly, we must get serious about holding to account those most responsible for attacks on health-care workers. Resolution 2286 (2016) strongly condemns the widespread impunity for attacks against health care, and urges States to conduct full, prompt, impartial and effective investigations. It is critical that these investigations be rigorous and serve the interests of justice, including the rights of victims.

The Security Council has an important role to play in ensuring that violations of international humanitarian law are properly investigated and, where appropriate, that those responsible are held accountable. While the Council cannot be the global enforcer of international humanitarian law, we must be willing to use the tools available to us when the circumstances demand.

Finally, continuing assaults on medical workers and facilities demonstrate the critical need for ongoing oversight by the Council. We ask the Secretary-General

to continue drawing attention to this issue in his regular reports to the Council. This reporting must be supported by the consistent collection of relevant data, including through information-sharing between the United Nations and relevant entities, such as the World Health Organization.

The Council should use the annual briefing provided for in resolution 2286 (2016) to highlight key challenges and to press States to take further steps, including by using their influence over warring parties, to improve compliance with international humanitarian law. We owe it to all those civilians caught up in conflict, as well as those who risk their lives to save others, to ensure that health-care workers are protected and that their neutrality is respected. Most of all, Council members have to show by their behaviour here and in the conflicts in which they are involved that their respect of international law is real. If they do not, they call into question the very purpose of this body and their right to sit on it.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked to make a further statement.

Mr. Zagaynov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I merely wish to briefly clarify the fact that, as I understand it, the interpretation of my statement was not entirely accurate. My reference to the fact that the suffering of civilians in Syria must come to an end was interpreted incorrectly. In that respect, we would ask members to refer to the correct version of our statement, which, as always, shall be circulated later.

The President: On behalf of the Council, I want to Ms. Liu and Mr. Maurer for their contributions to this debate. I commend them and all the people who work with them for their bravery and dedication.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussions.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7780

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7780th meeting
Thursday, 29 September 2016, 11 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Van Bohemen	(New Zealand)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gimolieca
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Egypt	Mr. Kandeel
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/796)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-30197 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/796)

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. O'Brien is joining us via video-teleconference from Geneva.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/796, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: Where shall I start? It is with raw grief, dismay, intense sadness, frustration and an unquenchable anger at the excess of sheer and unbridled horror — way beyond even the apex of horror of a fortnight ago — that I report today to the Security Council on the ultimate humanitarian shame that is Syria today, and in east Aleppo in particular. The people of Syria — and most immediately, the people of east Aleppo — are being subjected to deprivation, disease and death in increasing numbers and with increasing ferocity. This is not an unforeseen result of forces beyond our control. This is due to the action of parties to the conflict and it is the direct result of the inaction — be it through unwillingness or inability — of the international community, including most notably those members represented in this Chamber.

It is now a legitimate question to ask whether there is any level of disaster and death that can be visited upon the Syrian people that might prompt the parties to this conflict, and by extension the international community, to identify a red line that will not be crossed. This is not a distant conflict in which we as a community have only a passing stake; this is a critical test of the capacity and willingness of those in this Chamber to make a decision, take action to manifestly uphold the words of the Charter of the United Nations, to which all nations are bound, and to save the Syrian people from the scourge of war.

The past seven days have seen an intensification of attacks across the country. From air strikes in Deir ez-Zor to airstrikes and ground attacks in Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Idlib and rural Damascus and other governorates, fighting has intensified despite a one-week lull when the cessation of hostilities was reinstated, albeit with violations on all sides.

Nowhere has the fighting been more intense in recent days than in east Aleppo. Following the announcement by the Syrian Ministry of Defence of an offensive on 22 September, estimates are that some 320 civilians were killed and 765 injured in the first days. Over 100 children have been killed. These are not simply numbers to be added to a tally; these are individual and family lives that we have collectively failed to save. The alleged use of new bunker-busting bombs has reportedly caused mass destruction in an area that has already been decimated. I have received reports that there are bodies of babies, children, women and men stuck unrecovered in the rubble of the basements, up to 20 metres underground, where they had taken refuge and where they had been safe until the use of these new and recently introduced weapons claimed their lives. Air strikes are reported to have hit three of the four civil defense centres in east Aleppo, injuring staff and severely limiting their capacity to respond.

On 22 September, attacks rendered the Bab Al-Nayrab water-pumping station inoperable, stopping water delivery to most of east Aleppo. On 24 September, multiple air strikes struck the Jisr Al-Haj area in eastern Aleppo city, reportedly damaging warehouses belonging to the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and killing one of the few remaining doctors in east Aleppo, as well as his wife — a senior midwife. Just yesterday, two of the eight remaining hospitals — including two of the four surgical units left in east Aleppo — were attacked and rendered out of service. I echo the words of the Secretary-General, who briefed the Council yesterday:

> "[T]hose using ever-more destructive weapons know exactly what they are doing. They know they are committing war crimes." (*S/PV.7779, p. 2*)

And let it be said that the evidence is being collected and the eyewitnesses accounts recorded. Even if not today, one day there will be no hiding place for the individuals and institutions callously, cynically perpetrating these war crimes. That is as much our United Nations responsibility on behalf of all the world's Member States, as it is the United Nations duty to preserve that evidence to point the finger at any one or more Member States and their leaders and officers come the day. The only remaining deterrent it seems is that there will be real accountability in the court of world opinion and disgust. Goodness knows, nothing else seems to be working to stop this deliberate, gratuitous carnage of lives lost and smashed.

Let me be clear — east Aleppo this minute is not at the edge of the precipice; it is well into its terrible descent into the pitiless and merciless abyss of a humanitarian catastrophe unlike any we have witnessed in Syria, with no access by the United Nations since 7 July, and the health sector in east Aleppo is now reportedly on the very verge of total collapse. Hundreds of critical medical evacuations are urgently required. I have received alarming reports of patients being turned away or treated on the floors of the few remaining health facilities. What little intensive care unit capacity there was has now been completely overwhelmed. Four people — three of them children — who did not have access to ventilators died as a result. There are also reports of severe shortages of surgical items, blood bags, anaesthetics and other critical medical items. As a result, the priority for assistance is as acute for medical items as it is for food.

Because of the state of siege, food remains scarce, with rations sufficient to feed only 40,000 for one month. Despite the presence of limited food stocks, the impact of limited food access is already being felt. Deaths have been reported from malnutrition, disease and poisoning by those scavenging for food. Fresh water is also now also in short supply, and waterborne illnesses and preventable killer diseases are expected imminently to rise dramatically — which is as unnecessary as it is tragic.

There are more than 100,000 children trapped in east Aleppo, and it is they who are among the most vulnerable, who suffer first and who suffer the greatest. The images of Alan Kurdi, Omran Daqneesh and now Rawan Alowsh might have captured fleeting global attention and be seared into our consciences, but they are neither isolated nor exceptional cases, but emblematic of the horrific murder and abuse of children by the parties to this conflict. Rescue teams are finding children every day under piles of rubble amid the inferno and choking dust of east Aleppo. Meanwhile, indiscriminate attacks are also being launched by non-State armed groups into western Aleppo, so of course this is not just one-sided, but the overwhelming weight of forces is against the people pinned down in east Aleppo. We must end this nightmare.

We have been ready and we remain ready to deliver assistance to eastern Aleppo through cross-border and cross-line support. Despite the distraction, as it sadly turned out, in the attempt to get a full cessation of hostilities — which crowded out negotiations for a shorter humanitarian pause — since July I have been calling for a minimum 48-hour weekly humanitarian pause must be urgently implemented to allow humanitarian aid to enter, to let medical evacuations take those in critical condition out, and to provide civilians respite from the barrage of bombs and attacks causing untold suffering.

Now is not the time for political grandstanding or protection of one's political or, indeed, military position. Now is the time to recognize the horror unfolding before our eyes, agree upon our common humanity and restore the cessation of hostilities to protect civilians and save lives. That would be the best of humanitarian action; if we cannot get a cessation of hostilities, we must at the minimum have a weekly 48-hour pause. Anything less would leave the Council today on the wrong side of history and on the wrong side of avoidable deaths. That is the responsibility of the parties to the conflict, but it is the united will of each and every member of the Council that will unlock the chance to make it happen.

As Council members have heard me say before, there are few words left to describe the horrors for people living under siege. Theirs is a daily struggle for survival as they remain trapped and beyond our reach, subjected to collective punishment. This revolting situation in Aleppo must be the SOS, the mayday call, to the international community. That the situation now meets the criteria for besiegement — including militarily encirclement, lack of humanitarian access and lack of freedom of movement for civilians — is clear. East Aleppo is now besieged.

Let me assure the Council that this is based not on conjecture, but on the facts on the ground that I have just reported. The area is militarily encircled by Syrian forces. In addition, armed opposition groups continue to conduct military operations from within the city, placing those trapped there at greater and continued danger. Despite all our collective efforts, which have been discussed in great detail in the Council, there has been virtually no humanitarian access through cross-border or cross-line actors since early July. It should be noted that this is a result of constraints by both the Syrian authorities and non-State armed groups.

Furthermore, despite the assertion of there being corridors available, civilians wishing to travel in and out of eastern Aleppo are unable to do so in any significant numbers. Members would do the same: one just does not do it if they have nowhere to go voluntarily and if the sniper is likely to take the shot anyway. As we have long said, civilians cannot move when there are such levels of insecurity. We have also assessed this lack of movement based on the military presence at entry and exit points and specific security concerns, not just about sniper fire and detainment when travelling through humanitarian corridors that were established by the Russian Federation.

The status of another 275,000 people besieged in Syria is truly unconscionable. We all must do everything possible to bring this medieval practice to an end for once and for all. That means that the number of people besieged in Syria has increased from 586,200 to 861,200, after deducting those who were required to leave Darayya as of late August. That is in addition to the millions of Syrians in hard-to-reach locations today.

Besiegement is not a weapon of war, it is a flagrant, unjustifiable breach of the law — law to which the besieging parties have signed up to. As the Syrian people struggle for survival and a political solution remains out of reach, the best that communities under attack can immediately hope for is that humanitarian assistance can reach them. The role of humanitarians is not to be part of a political solution, but to provide food, shelter and the tools of survival to those in need, while that solution is sought. Those efforts to protect the vulnerable, to deliver to communities in need and to step in to fill the gap where no alternative exists were dealt a cruel blow last week.

After half a decade of conflict, it should not be necessary to explain to any party that the laws of war afford protection to humanitarian aid workers. In 2016, I should not have to brief the Security Council on violence committed against those who are aligned with no side in the conflict and who are willing to enter the most challenging environments imaginable to help those suffering beyond imagination. Yet last week, while leaders from around the world met to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Syria, we suffered a devastating attack on a humanitarian convoy.

In the early evening of 19 September, as 31 trucks delivered lifesaving assistance just kilometers west of Aleppo city in Oram Al-Kubra, humanitarians came under attack in yet another shocking example of the disregard parties have for civilian life and humanitarian space. Over the course of two hours, the area around a clearly marked United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent humanitarian convoy became a killing zone. Eighteen humanitarians — 12 volunteers, five drivers and Omar Barakat, head of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in Oram Al-Kubra — were brutally killed. Another 15 drivers were wounded, many civilians were killed and injured and the warehouse where the supplies were being unloaded and a nearby medical clinic were both severely damaged. The local population has been further traumatized by witnessing what happens to those who try to help them. And of course, they did not receive the desperately needed lifesaving help — a double jeopardy defined.

I have expressed my deepest condolences to the families, colleagues and loved ones of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice, and I pledge to do my utmost to ensure that their deaths were not in vain. I call on all of us to take hold of this moment. I call on the Council to urgently act to protect humanitarian actors, be they United Nations staff or our non-governmental organization partners, who face violent responses almost daily. I also call on the Council to push against all blockages and delays that are hindering the deployment of assistance, and to ensure the rapid, safe and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid to all those in need. Most important, I call on the Council to end the bloodshed.

The humanitarian convoy to Oram Al-Kubra was a meticulously organized movement, as are all deployments of humanitarian aid. When crossing a conflict line to deliver assistance, the United Nations and its partners first receive authorization by the Syrian authorities. Advanced notification is given to all sides, and ongoing updates of the convoy's location and status

are provided throughout its movement. United Nations humanitarian aid convoys inform all actors on the ground of the humanitarian delivery being undertaken. Such de-confliction is done to ensure that the delivery is safe from attack.

We do not yet have all the details. However, it is not too early to make clear the consequences of this shameful attack. If the attackers knew of the humanitarian convoy and intentionally directed an attack against it, they committed a war crime. Regardless of the reason and regardless of the party responsible, those people must know that they will be held to account. Accountability is important for the sake of justice, but it is also necessary to end the culture of impunity. That is as much a matter of practicality as it is of principle. If there are no guarantees that humanitarian convoys will be safe, the ability of humanitarians to deliver assistance will be jeopardized and those in need will continue to suffer. As I have said before, those on the front lines delivering aid are brave, but they are not suicidal. Sufficient security guarantees for the delivery of aid must be in place. Yes, that means engaging with all parties impartially, even to the distaste of some. Those are the humanitarian principles in which I and others in the United Nations and beyond involved in humanitarian action rely to give us our license to operate. For us access is everything. Without it, as we go far and wide across Syria, we cannot make the difference that the world's citizens call on us to make.

The Secretary-General has called for a vigorous investigation to ascertain the facts of the incident and for accountability for those responsible. The Secretary-General is currently reviewing options for the most effective format of the investigation. I call on all parties to stand up, demonstrate their desire to protect humanitarian space and support the investigation process, for full, transparent accountability and to banish impunity.

While it is true that the United Nations and its partners support millions of people with assistance each month through regular programming and cross-border activities, those who are in the most acute need are often those who cannot be reached through either modality. While we focus much of the attention on ensuring humanitarian access via cross-line convoys, this is not to take away from other modalities, which do most of the actual aid delivery, but to ensure attention is focused on the locations we cannot otherwise reach.

In both hard-to-reach and besieged locations, we have continued to reach communities in need through inter-agency cross-line convoys in September. On 19 September, we reached 84,000 people in Talbiseh; on 22 September, we reached 35,000 people in Moadamiya; on 24 September, we reached 70,000 people in Al-Waer in Homs; and the following day we reached some 60,000 people in the four towns — Madaya, Zabadani, Fo'ah and Kefraya. And we continue to reach people through the air — both by airdrops and air-bridges. We have now completed 126 air drops since April to Deir ez-Zour, dispatching food, nutrition, health, water and sanitation and hygiene supplies to people in need. That includes two full rounds of food distribution, each reaching a total of 110,000 people in need. A third round began on 12 August. We have now completed 90 airlifts to Qamishly, providing a combination of food, health, water, sanitation and hygiene supplies, nutrition, education, shelter and non-food-item assistance, including over 50,000 full food rations.

As for the people along the berm at the Syrian-Jordanian border, which I visited earlier this month, we have received positive indications from the Jordanian authorities that humanitarian organizations might be able to resume aid operations to reach those stranded there by early next month. We look forward to all the security and other arrangements being put into place so that can happen, until longer-term solutions are found. I am grateful to those who are working to hard to achieve that.

While we welcome these deliveries, which provide a lifeline to people largely trapped beyond our reach, the last weeks have been especially frustrating to see pass without access improving, particularly since the reinstatement of the cessation of hostilities should have provided an opportunity to extend our reach. Instead, the delays in cross-line deployments are becoming commonplace. The first inter-agency cross-line convoy in September deployed on 19 September. The first cross-line convoy last month only deployed on 23 August. That means that no aid reached many of those most in need through inter-agency cross-line convoys for the first three weeks each of the last two months.

The delivery of assistance to the four towns, the first after the five months since aid was last admitted on 30 April, occurred only after numerous hurdles and delays caused by the last minute removal of medical items, which required an additional set of negotiations of the parties to reach a final agreement. Beyond the

four towns, medical supplies have continued to be removed from humanitarian convoys, with more than 200,000 items having been removed this year alone. And linking humanitarian assistance of any kind to the tit for tat provisions of the Four Towns Agreement remains unconscionable.

As I have said many times, the United Nations has been and continues to be ready to deploy. Our requests are submitted and trucks are ready to move, but they have been delayed by the same bureaucratic tactics — late responses, lack of facilitation letters, negotiations over the number of beneficiaries. While such problems are being faced with alarming regularity, this month also brought further delaying tactics to deny aid to those in desperate need, such as the slow clearance by Syrian security forces in the warehouses and, in the case of Moadamiya, the damaging of items by security forces. Trucks had to be reloaded in the presence of Russian officers to ensure the cooperation of Syrian security personnel. Just yesterday, a convoy intended for Douma, despite having received all necessary guarantees and approvals, was denied access at the last Government checkpoint. After waiting over eight hours at the last Syrian checkpoint, it was forced to return to the warehouse.

Of course, insecurity has also continued to be a significant factor in limiting deployment. Just two days ago, on 27 September, a convoy to ar-Rastan was cancelled by the United Nations, when the trucks were at the last checkpoint of Syrian armed forces, due to air strikes over the town that the United Nations and its partners were attempting to reach. This is yet another convoy where all sides were informed of the movement, and all sides provided assurances of security, but failed to deliver safe passage. Surely you can imagine the hell for civilians, who woke up that morning hoping to finally receive life-saving aid but finding themselves instead under relentless attack.

We are now awaiting the response of the Government to the October inter-agency convoy plan, submitted on 19 September. The United Nations has requested to reach 962,800 people in 29 besieged, hard-to-reach and priority cross-line areas. A response is expected in the next day, and I call on the Syrian authorities to respond positively and on time to the request and to see the request response implemented in a timely manner. We cannot allow another month to go by where we wait three weeks before the first cross-line convoy. As insecurity increases, civilian suffering does as well. Sustained and safe access must be granted, based on the United Nations assessment of need.

Syria is bleeding. Its citizens are dying. We all hear their cry for help. As humanitarians, we are doing all we can. Last week, world leaders came to New York, sat around this table and met in ministerial level meetings, all with no tangible results. Instead, while the world leaders were meeting, violence actually increased — more civilians and more humanitarians were killed. It is time to place blame. It is time that the Council stops tolerating the utter disregard for the most basic provisions of international humanitarian law.

I call on the Council to act now, to do right by those who have sacrificed their lives and to take whatever steps are necessary to end the violence. The alternative simply does not bear considering. The depravity we see will only get worse. If the parties to the conflict will not, then the world's only hope is the collective, united will and measures of the Security Council. It is up to the Council to turn the tide, to create the conditions for aid to reach all in need, to end the sieges, to restore political dialogue and to bring an end to the war.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien for his very sobering briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the member of the Council who wishes to make a statement.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for his detailed briefing. My delegation has requested the floor because we believe that such briefings are not solely for the Security Council but for all of the Members of the Organization. In that regard, as an elected member of the Council, we believe that it is our duty to share with the Members that elected us to this position our opinions on the theme of the open briefings. In order to ensure greater transparency in our work, I shall now share the view of my delegation. We would also like to be consistent with our actions on Monday, when we took the floor as the political dimension of the conflict was being addressed with Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura (see S/PV.7777).

I take this opportunity to thank you, Sir, for having convened on 21 September the high-level meeting of the Council (S/PV.7774) at which Heads of State, Heads of Government and Ministers spoke in favour of finding a negotiated solution to the crisis. Over the past week, we have borne witness to an abhorrent attack

on a humanitarian aid convoy, in violation of the most basic rules of international humanitarian law. In the past few hours, the city of Aleppo — or rather, what is left of Aleppo — has been devastated by one of the most intense air strikes since the start of the conflict, causing hundreds of deaths and enormous damage to infrastructure that was already practically in ruins.

This military escalation is another blow to the protection of civilians and to the expectations of the Syrian population to stop the protracted suffering that has lasted for more than five years. As we did yesterday during the briefing on the implementation of resolution 2286 (2016) (see S/PV.7779), we again vigorously condemn the continued air strikes on hospitals and medical facilities in Syria, which have recently become a repeated criminal practice and must stop immediately. We condemn the use of besiegement and hunger as a war tactic and appeal to the perpetrators of such acts to lift the sieges affecting millions of people in Syria. We continue to support the 48-hour weekly humanitarian pauses that could be the precursor to another ceasefire.

Nine months into the year, seven months since the adoption of resolution 2254 (2015) and seven months since the adoption of resolution 2268 (2016), and after almost 50 Security Council meetings on the situation in Syria, the situation appears to be worsening day by day. The statements we make here, however good our intentions, do not change the reality on the ground. Aleppo and other areas in Syria continue to witness the daily horror of ceaseless bombings that are gradually exterminating its population. It is carnage without any justification whatsoever in the eyes of a world that appears incapable of responding to so much barbarism.

Given the situation, a few days ago we asked what the Security Council will do and what the results of our deliberations will be in the light of a horror seldom seen in recent times. In spite of the fact that all of us present here having stated ad nauseam that there can be no military solution in Syria, events on the ground prove otherwise. Therefore, until the parties to the conflict in Syria and those supporting them cease their attempts to reach their objectives in that manner, it will be very difficult for us to reach an agreement that would enable the parties to resume negotiations to find a political solution to the conflict.

This is a defining moment. Thus far, the Syrian people and the international community have witnessed the failure of the Council to stop the hostilities, ensure sustained, regular and safe access for humanitarian aid, and create the necessary conditions to resume the process of political transition established in resolution 2254 (2015), which has been stalled for five months. It is our responsibility to fulfil the duties of the Council or go down in history as those to blame for being incapable of stopping one of the worst conflicts that humankind has seen this decade.

I plead for us to pursue every effort to set aside our differences and achieve once and for all a commitment to finding a new and perhaps final impulse to the search for a political solution for Syria. In that regard, we again urge the Russian Federation and the United States of America to continue talks in order to arrive at the agreements necessary to finally end the conflict and ensure the gradual restoration of peace in Syria. The Council can count on the support of Uruguay.

It is likely that if the Council were to consider Syria in terms of giving priority to the men, women and children, civilians and workers, who make up the vast majority of the population of that country, it would arrive at a more viable solution. The hundreds of thousands of victims and millions of Syrians who have seen their lives affected by the war will bear witness to our future decisions.

The President: I thank the representative of Uruguay for his statement, which reflects the views of the New Zealand delegation and, I am sure, those of many others in the Chamber.

As this is the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of September, I would like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of New Zealand to the members of the Council, especially my colleagues the Permanent Representatives, their respective staffs and the Secretariat for all the support that they have given to us.

Today's meeting takes on special poignance for me and my team. It will probably be another two decades before a New Zealander presides over the Security Council.

It has been a very busy month. We have reached decisions on several important issues, notably with regard to Colombia, aviation security, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and Afghanistan. But as today's briefing has underlined, we have not been able to reach decisions on the most pressing issue facing us. That is a matter of deep disappointment to

my delegation. Nonetheless, we recognize the very hard work, support and positive contributions of all delegations and representatives of the Secretariat, as well as all conference service officers and interpreters.

As we end our presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of the Russian Federation our best wishes for the month of October.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7781

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7781st meeting

Tuesday, 4 October 2016, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Churkin	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2016/812)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-30714 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President (*spoke in Russian*): As this is the first public meeting of the Council for the month of October, I should like to take this opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to His Excellency Ambassador Gerard Van Bohemen, Permanent Representative of New Zealand, for his service as President of the Council for the month of September. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Van Bohemen and his delegation for the great diplomatic skill with which they conducted the Council's business last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2016/812)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Sudan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/812, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ladsous.

Mr. Ladsous (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank you, Sir, for giving me this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the situation in Darfur. The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/812), issued on 27 September, provides updates on the main developments in the situation. I should therefore like to focus today on some of the most salient points in the report and on several important events that have taken place in the past week.

First, with respect to the security situation, we must acknowledge that the situation in the Jebel Marra region of Central Darfur remains volatile. The fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid that took place from January to May has somewhat abated in intensity but has never stopped altogether. Since June, there have been new skirmishes and frequent aerial bombardments in the area. There is a sense that the security situation deteriorated further as of 17 September, when there were reports of heavy fighting around Gulo and Guldo, situated north-east of Nertiti in Central Darfur. Other clashes have also occurred in western Jebel Marra, in which at least nine villages have been attacked.

Unfortunately, the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) is not in a position to confirm these reports or to evaluate the military situation with any precision because, I am compelled to reiterate, the Government of the Sudan continues to impose access restrictions. However, we have our ears to the ground, and as the recent clashes seem to demonstrate, since the Sudanese Government launched its offensive in January its forces have only partially succeeded in achieving their objective of dislodging the fighters of the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid from their operational bases in the foothills of Jebel Marra. Continued fighting in recent weeks is clearly worrisome, given the fact that the dry season, which has just begun, is usually the optimal time for large-scale military operations.

Moreover, we have received limited and conflicting information on the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid. The movement continues to deny having lost ground and suffered losses in Jebel Marra, while the Government maintains that the entire region is under the control of regular forces and that the recent rebel attacks were really only desperate attempts to give the illusion that the Abdul Wahid movement had survived politically and militarily.

(*spoke in English*)

The security situation in other parts of Darfur remained calm but with a sporadic seasonal spike in violence between pastoralists and farmers over the use and management of water and grazing land. Outbreaks of intercommunal and intracommunal violence occurred in some hotspot areas, amid a reduction in

the number of large-scale conflicts. Local authorities continued to take measures to contain the situation by facilitating peace agreements and ensuring the presence of Government forces in the more sensitive areas. Khartoum also announced a strategy to address intercommunal conflicts and curb criminality by, among other measures, the regulation and control of weapons. That certainly is encouraging recognition of the seriousness of the situation.

But, beyond those measures, complex challenges in terms of governance and development still need to be addressed in order to try to restore the social fabric and peaceful coexistence among communities in a region crippled by over a decade of conflict. UNAMID continues to support central and local Government initiatives to restore peace and stability in communities. Of course, the Mission remains focused on the core objective given by the Council — to protect civilians. I can only call on the Government of the Sudan and on the international community to work closely, and in good cooperation, to address all these challenges.

Turning to the humanitarian angle, the impact of the conflict remains significant. Since the resumption of the fighting, as I mentioned earlier, in Golo and Guldo on 17 September, humanitarian agencies estimate that about 5,500 newly displaced people, mainly women and children, have arrived in the Nertiti-north camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs), although community leaders in the camps report higher numbers — of up to 12,500 people. There are further reports of an additional 4,000 people having arrived in Guldo town. At this stage, none of the reported numbers can be verified. Local authorities have issued instructions to humanitarian agencies that they are to limit their activities only to old established caseloads, and should not verify, register or share information pertaining to newly arrived IDPs. Moreover, international non-governmental organizations have reported that all missions between Nertiti and Guldo have been stopped until further notice.

Despite those access and reporting restrictions, UNAMID continues to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance through logistical support and protection, while engaging the parties to immediately cease hostilities and the Government to allow immediate, full and unhindered access conflict areas in Jebel Marra.

Turn to the political situation, as members will recall, the road map agreement was signed at Addis Ababa on 8 August by the members of the Sudan Call. The African Union High-level Implementation Panel then convened talks between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/North, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi. Those talks were held from 9 to 14 August to consider draft agreements on humanitarian access and a cessation of hostilities in both Darfur the two Areas. Both sets of talks were suspended until further notice following persistent disagreements between the parties.

In the face of that impasse, the High-level Implementation Panel, the Special Envoy and UNAMID continued their engagement with the parties to try to bridge their differences. At the beginning of September, UNAMID held consultations with the leaders of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/North, the JEM and the Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi in Kampala. All restated their areas of contention in the talks and indicated that, if necessary flexibility were demonstrated by both parties on two issues — on the release of prisoners of war and on the mechanism for the oversight of humanitarian assistance — an agreement could be reached.

The Government and the Darfur armed movements, together with UNAMID, are expected to travel to Doha for engagement with the Government of Qatar on the way forward. The High-level Implementation Panel also held a new round of informal consultations in Addis Ababa last week end. Regrettably, the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid remains outside of the negotiation process, and no consultations with its leadership have taken place since the last meeting with the UNAMID Joint Special Representative, which took place last July in Paris.

Meanwhile on the ground in Darfur, on 7 September, President Al-Bashir hosted the Presidents of Chad and the Central African Republic and the Emir of Qatar at a ceremony to mark the end of the Darfur Regional Authority (DRA). On that occasion, he announced a new era of peace and stability for Darfur. And, on 21 September, the President issued a decree formally dissolving the Darfur Regional Authority and all bodies established under the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, with a few exceptions. On the same day, and as earlier promised by President Al-Bashir, the

Government released 21 children it claimed had been captured in clashes with the JEM in 2015.

With regard to the National Dialogue, on 26 September, President Al-Bashir officially received the recommendations of the National Dialogue Conference, which he pledged to implement following its conclusion on 10 October. As political disagreements remain over that end date, and as the Sudan Call — as it calls itself — maintains its rejection of the National Dialogue Conference, the political process remains seriously constrained.

I am, however, pleased to report a relative improvement in the issuance of visas to UNAMID personnel and the processing of ration containers for our troops. However, a significant amount of United Nations and contingent-owned equipment remains at Port Sudan, which continues to hamper the operational effectiveness of the Mission. During my most recent meetings with officials of the Government of the Sudan, they promised that measures would be taken to address bureaucratic and procedural impediments and to ensure the release of those shipments.

On 17 October, the African Union, the United Nations and the Government of the Sudan will resume their engagement on the exit strategy based on the parameters set by the Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council. A critical step in that process will be the development of agreed criteria for gauging progress towards the UNAMID benchmarks agreed upon following the last convening of the Joint Working Group, in May.

Ending the protracted suffering of the civilian population in Darfur must remain the main priority of the international community. In that context, we are aware of the allegations regarding the use of chemical weapons against civilians by Government of the Sudan forces in Jebel Marra, as presented in the Amnesty International report that was released on 29 September. We have not come across any evidence regarding the use of chemical weapons in the Jebel Marra. At the same time, as Council members know, the Government of the Sudan has consistently denied any access by UNAMID to conflict areas in the Jebel Marra, which has clearly prevented the mission from being able to monitor effectively and report on the impact of the fighting.

I have to note further that an initial assessment by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has stated that without further information or evidence being made available, it is not possible at this stage for it to draw any conclusions based on the content of the Amnesty International report. I would therefore encourage the Government of the Sudan, which is party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, to extend its full cooperation to any future OPCW investigation, as in fact the Government in Khartoum has expressed it was ready to do in its statements to the media following the publication of the report, which underscores the absolute urgency of the need for a cessation of hostilities in Darfur and a need for the Security Council to act in unison to bring about an end to armed conflict in the region.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that, with the signature by all the parties to the political road map proposed by the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, we have taken an important step forward in the peace process. This now needs to be consolidated, and the parties should from now on implement both the letter and the spirit of the document and undertake to resume negotiations so as to come quickly to an accord on both the cessation of hostilities and the modalities of humanitarian access to the conflict zones. I would call on them to listen attentively to the hopes of the people, hopes that are focused on peace, stability and a somewhat better livelihood through development. We remain convinced that the Security Council will bring all the support needed for the cooperative effort of the international mediators to achieve those objectives.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Ladsous for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the member of the Council who wishes to make a statement.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have requested the floor in the understanding that these informational briefings for the members of the Security Council could also benefit from members expressing their opinions, without prejudice to the consultations that will follow, where we can address issues that require greater confidentiality.

Since this is the first time I am taking the floor under the your presidency, Sir, I congratulate you on having taken up this new responsibility. I also pledge the full support of my delegation. At the same time, I would like to thank Ambassador Gerard van Bohemen, Permanent Representative of New Zealand, and his entire team for

the excellent work they did during their presidency in the month of September. It was a particularly difficult month, not only in terms of logistics, but also in terms of the various developments that took place.

I thank Under-Secretary-General Hervé Ladsous for his introducing the report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/812). In my brief comments, I shall refer to three points: the political process, the humanitarian situation and the restrictions on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and humanitarian actors.

Uruguay welcomes the various steps forward mentioned by Mr. Ladsous that have taken place since the signing of the road map agreement last August 8 by various movements, including the Sudan Call, the Justice and Equality Movement, the Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minnawi, and others. The agreement the new signatories joined, which was facilitated by the African Union High-level Implementation Panel and had already been signed by the Government of the Sudan, has the objectives of paving the way to putting an end to the conflict in Darfur and the Two Areas and of addressing urgent humanitarian needs and the underlying causes of conflict. Unfortunately, as was also pointed out by Mr. Ladsous, we have not obtained entirely positive results and we are particularly concerned about the absence from the negotiating table of certain groups, including, and more recently, the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid, which continues to reject any type of dialogue.

With respect to the humanitarian situation, Uruguay reiterates its concern for the more than 2.5 million people who have been displaced, and we are encouraged by the reference in the Secretary-General's report to the fact that open hostilities have generally diminished in Darfur in recent months. In accordance with the information provided by the United Nations humanitarian team, more than 80,000 people, particularly women and children, have allegedly been displaced in Darfur since the beginning of the year, especially due to the clashes in the Jebel Marra area.

Against this backdrop, it is crucial that UNAMID personnel comply fully with the provisions of its mandate and that humanitarian actors have the necessary conditions to provide humanitarian assistance to the people affected by the conflict. It is also crucial that the Government of the Sudan guarantee without delay unhindered access for UNAMID and the humanitarian partners to the communities affected by the conflict with a view to carrying out monitoring and verification missions as well as to deliver humanitarian assistance.

Furthermore, while we note that there has been a relative improvement in the issuance of visas for UNAMID personnel and the dispatching of rations containers for the troops, we reiterate that in accordance with its obligations under the Status of Forces Agreement, the Government of the Sudan must take urgent measures to eliminate all bureaucratic obstacles and ensure that UNAMID enjoys the conditions necessary to full compliance with its mandate. As we have pointed out on several occasions in relation to operations in other areas, my delegation attaches particularly importance to the issue of States' compliance with their obligations in relation to United Nations operations in their territories.

In conclusion, I would like to express Uruguay's gratitude to all of UNAMID's personnel and the United Nations humanitarian country team and its partners, who continue to work tirelessly, often in difficult conditions, to achieve a sustainable peace in Darfur.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Mohamed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on taking up the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I also express my thanks and esteem to the outgoing President, the Permanent Representative of New Zealand, for his able guidance of the Council's work in September. I further thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2016/812), and Mr. Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his briefing.

The situation in Darfur in the reporting period reflects great improvement on the security front. The Sudan Armed Forces have succeeded in pushing back against rebel groups in all of the states and subregions of Darfur, with the exception of certain pockets of Jebel Marra, a subregion of Central Darfur, which is one of the five administrative units of Greater Darfur. I am just explaining the geography of the area we are looking at today. It is the subregion of the Jebel Marra that is being used by the/Abdul Wahid rebels.

The five Federal states of Darfur and the Government in Khartoum have spared no effort in restoring security and to prevent tribal conflicts.

The number of conflicts has declined and their consequences are now almost non-existent. According to humanitarian statistics, after the security situation improved, the number of voluntary returned internally displaced persons (IDPs) increased. More than 150,000 IDPs have returned to their villages and enjoy security and basic services in those villages, provided, most notably, by the brotherly State of Qatar and the Arab League under the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. The Sudanese Government is also doing its utmost to address the needs of displaced persons and those who wish to stay in camps by integrating such camps into villages and providing the necessary services.

At the beginning of September, with His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Sudan and the participation and support of His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani of Qatar, the President of Chad and the President of the Central African Republic, Darfur marked the end of the Darfur Regional Authority, which had been established pursuant to the 2011 Doha Document for Peace in Darfur to supervise the implementation of the Agreement's provisions. That Agreement, and in particular the administrative referendum, was fully implemented, in which the people of Darfur decided to keep the current system with the five states. There was broad participation, which means that the region's residents are now enjoying security and their rights and freedoms. That was also demonstrated by their participation in the administrative referendum and other activities, including construction, in order to change the face of a region that we hold very dearly.

The Sudanese Government is sparing no effort to ensure sound and comprehensive peace in the country, while pushing back the spectre of violence and war. The President of the Republic launched the National Dialogue initiative, with a special oversight committee that began deliberations so as to submit recommendations during to the National Dialogue Conference on 10 October. The door is open and everyone has been invited — those who hope to join these efforts for peace, stability and rejection of violence. We would like to build a country on a foundation of unanimity and consensus.

I therefore appeal to the international community and the Council to bring pressure to bear on all those who do not wish to join in the efforts of national dialogue. I would remiss were I not to mention the signing by some armed groups and political parties of the road map in Addis Ababa, under the auspices of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel. On the other hand, Abdul Wahid and his rebels have rejected all initiatives and appeals for peace and negotiation and are counting on support offered by some countries. From this forum, I would like to call upon all of those providing protection and support to put an end to it and to put pressure on the movement to ensure that it joins efforts in Darfur.

I would like to reiterate that it is high time to begin implementing the exit strategy for African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur to draw down on troop levels in a mission where there is really no more need for such troops, in particular in the west, north and south of Darfur. Once again, the Sudanese Government would like to see that drawdown carried out in a gradual manner, in several stages, to ensure that the Mission is handed over to the United Nations country team to work to rebuild peace and security in the country within the framework of development.

The report of the Secretary-General highlights several positive aspects in Darfur, notably the rebuilding of peace and a reduction in crime and banditism. The report also mentions the reduction in the number of tribal conflicts during the reporting period. There was also reference to the activities of armed groups. The Government's efforts to ensure peace and security in Darfur are also stressed in the report. Once again, I would like to reaffirm that our Government is determined to cooperate and coordinate efforts with the Mission to ensure that it is able to fully carry out its mandate, including the exit strategy, according to resolution 1769 (2007). Our Governmer has made a firm commitment to the Mission since its deployment to date and until the very last soldier leaves. I would also like to share the comments made by the Head of the Mission, who said that the issuance of visas is no longer a problem for the Mission and that the Sudanese Government has taken the necessary action in order to allow containers of rations to be shipped through.

(*spoke in English*)

Finally, 13 years ago, in 2003, conflict erupted in Darfur. At that time, it was considered to be the worst conflict in the world. In 2004, the N'Djamena Agreement was signed and followed up by the Abuja Agreement in 2006, but to no avail. Spoilers from within and outside of the Sudan effectively joined hands. In 2011, thanks to the joint efforts by the Government of the Sudan, the United Nations, the African Union and the Arab League, the Doha Agreement was concluded

and eventually implemented up to September this year, when we officially celebrated the end of the conflict.

During his meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Sudan last week, the Secretary-General thoughtfully and earnestly stated that, together, we had charted troubled waters and come a long way. Images of Darfur and its war were everywhere, and now we are talking about reconstruction, development and an exit strategy. Now is not the time to allow spoilers wearing various disguises and masks to prolong the conflict in the Sudan and destabilize the country. They will not budge but, together, with the Security Council, we are now more confident that that will not be allowed to happen.

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7782

Security Council

Distr.: General
6 October 2016

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 7782nd (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 6 October 2016, at 10.28 a.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

"At its 7782nd meeting, held in private on 6 October 2016, the Security Council considered the question of the recommendation for the appointment of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

"The Security Council adopted by acclamation the following resolution:

'*The Security Council*,

'*Having considered* the question of the recommendation for the appointment of the Secretary-General of the United Nations,

'*Recommends* to the General Assembly that Mr. António Guterres be appointed Secretary-General of the United Nations for a term of office from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2021.'"

16-17347 (E) 061016

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United Nations S PV.7783

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7783rd meeting

Thursday, 6 October 2016, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Zagaynov	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	China	Mr. Xu Zhongsheng
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Taula
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Gasso Matoses
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermudez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

Maintenance of international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2240 (2015) (S/2016/766)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

16-31181 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Maintenance of international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2240 (2015) (S/2016/766)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Libya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Palau, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/766, which contains the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to Security Council resolution 2240 (2015).

Members of the Council have before them document S/2016/838, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Palau, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

It is my understanding that the Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Angola, China, Egypt, France, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay

Abstaining:

Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): There were 14 votes in favour and one abstaining. The draft resolution has been adopted as resolution 2312 (2016).

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements following the voting.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes the adoption of resolution 2312 (2016), which renews the mandate of the European Union's Operation SOPHIA for an additional 12 months. I am proud of the United Kingdom's role as penholder, and I am grateful to those Security Council delegations that supported the resolution today.

It is a vital renewal. The migration crisis remains one of our greatest shared challenges. Thousands have perished crossing the Mediterranean and thousands more continue to risk their lives to find a safer future. So many, perhaps all of them, have been exploited — by gangs, at the darkest points in their lives, with no regard for their safety, with no respect for anything other than profit.

In October last year, we took a stand against these traffickers. We authorized all European Union member States contributing to the Operation to interdict these gangsters and their boats on the high seas. Since that adoption, the brave men and women of Operation SOPHIA have directly apprehended 90 suspected smugglers and have put over 300 smuggling vessels beyond use. In doing so, we have sent a clear signal that smugglers can no longer operate with impunity in international waters.

The European Union's efforts have also saved lives — over 26,000 are estimated to have been rescued. But the smuggling networks have not been defeated. Therefore, through this renewal today, let us recommit our support to Operation SOPHIA as it continues its vital work to arrest smugglers and seize their boats. And let us be clear in this open meeting that Operation SOPHIA is only targeting smugglers and empty boats. Migrants encountered as part of the Operation will be taken to Europe as part of existing procedures. The European Union will do all that it can to protect the rights of those who need that protection.

Action against smugglers on the high seas is a key part, but only part, of the solution to addressing the

mass movement of people. We need to do more to tackle the root causes, including poverty, conflict and human rights violations and abuses. We must also do more to support countries that are hosting refugees from neighbouring countries and help reduce the secondary movements, which pose so many dangers for migrants and refugees.

While we recognize the benefits of migration to source and destination countries, as well as to the migrants themselves, the process must be managed. All States have the right to control their own borders in line with international law, but also in line with the obligation to accept the return of their nationals. We therefore need a comprehensive approach to the mass movement of people. Resolution 2312 (2016) is one part of that effort and an important part of the wider solution to the crisis.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela abstained in the voting on resolution 2312 (2016), which extends for an additional year the mandate of resolution 2240 (2015), on the illicit smuggling of migrants and human trafficking in the Mediterranean Sea. We did so because we believe that the reasons that led our delegation a year ago to take the same decision have not changed significantly. We are thus consistent in maintaining our position as it was expressed in 2015.

We reiterate our doubts that the resolution is an adequate instrument to comprehensively and appropriately address the tragedy being lived out by thousands of human beings — which is a consequence of the tragedy of war, political instability, poverty, terrorism and widespread violence that are plaguing major regions of Africa and the Middle East — who are desperately trying to reach safe havens even at the risk of their own lives, while becoming the victims of criminal organizations that benefit from the smuggling in and trafficking of human beings.

The report (S/2016/766) of the Secretary-General submitted in accordance with resolution 2240 (2015) expresses deep concern in paragraphs 59 and 3, respectively that

> "the number of men, women and children who die or go missing in the Mediterranean Sea has not fallen,
>
> "[and that] national and regional efforts have not resulted in an immediate improvement in the situation".

In accordance with statistics of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for the month of August, there were 3,177 deaths and disappearances in the Mediterranean Sea. The number of unaccompanied or separated minors who reached Italy via the Mediterranean also has significantly increased as compared to 2015 —by approximately 116 per cent for the period from January to July.

The complexity and multidimensional nature of the phenomenon requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond a merely military and security-oriented approachk, including recourse to Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, as some States within this organ claim to encourage. Venezuela once again therefore rejects the security- and criminalization-oriented approach to the issue of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. We have to ask ourselves whether the flow of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants towards the shores of the Mediterranean has been reduced or is merely an issue of containing them on land? Is it perhaps the case that the existence of criminal organizations linked to human trafficking and smuggling is the root cause of the flows of refugees and migrants from Africa to Europe?

We could find answers to those questions, if we began by acknowledging that this human tragedy has worsened in recent years as the political, economic and social situation in the Middle East and North Africa — the result of foreign interference, military interventionism and war — has continued to worsen in tandem. Those who promote destabilization and crisis in legal and legitimately constituted Governments should bear in mind that the significant increase in the flows of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees is primarily a consequence of the terrible, violent conditions and social disintegration that have fomented armed conflict and military aggression in countries such as Libya, Syria and Iraq, among others, as well as poverty and social exclusion affecting the poorest countries.

For Venezuela, today's resolution addresses only a tiny part of this complex problem, and we believe that it is essential to consider and adopt measures in connection with the underlying causes, which are forcing thousands of people to undertake such

dangerous maritime journeys, as well as the reasons that lead them to become victims of human trafficking and smuggling.

> The report of the Secretary-General also states in paragraphs 4 and 6, respectively, that,
>
> "increasing control over some routes ... may have led to more frequent use of other routes ...
>
> "[a]s controls tighten and in the absence of commensurate safe and regular pathways, irregular crossings become more difficult, leading to a growing market for the services of smugglers".

It is not by building walls or invoking Chapter VII of the Charter that we must address the underlying causes for the flows of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants towards other regions, including Europe. It seems that, beyond the argument of fighting against criminal gangs, the purpose of such resolutions is simply to prevent these poor and desperate human beings from reaching safer destinations, as can be seen by the increasing number of restrictive and exclusionary policies that have proliferated in some European countries with regard to asylum seekers and migrants seeking shelter, which have moreover spread racist and xenophobic feelings in the region, thereby undermining governance in receiving countries.

According to several studies, to date, 70 walls have been built or are under construction around the world. Through measures such as these, we are gradually heading towards a world in which the countries of the North will be surrounded by walls that will, rather than respond with the solidarity and human and moral responsibility called for by the situation, prevent them from seeing and becoming sensitized to the terrible reality of the people plagued by wars, most of which are encouraged and promoted by the centres of power. We cannot forget, as during other periods in history, how Latin America and the Caribbean — and especially Venezuela — opened their doors to millions of citizens who sought security, peace and opportunities in our countries.

We wish to furthermore point out that the implementation of international measures to alleviate this human tragedy must be carried out in a concerted and coordinated manner. The issue requires broad-based and democratic forums for discussion, such as the General Assembly, to ensure the full participation of all Member States, with the involvement of countries of origin, transit and destination. Similarly, it is also fundamental that there be coordination and the generation of synergies between these countries and the various entities of the United Nations having competence in the area and the existing regional and subregional mechanisms.

To conclude, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reiterates its unequivocal commitment to fulfilling the obligations under the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and other international legal instruments and resolutions related to the issue of human trafficking, as well as to the inescapable principle of shared but differentiated responsibility, which should be borne in mind in addressing this issue.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay is aware of the alarming migration and refugee situation at the global level. According to data of the International Organization for Migration, between 1 January and 28 September approximately 302,486 migrants and refugees entered Europe by sea and 3,502 men, women and children died or disappeared. We often see heart-breaking images of the dead from North Africa and the Middle East who, while trying desperately to escape from the wars and the conflicts that have brokenout there, cross the Mediterranean Sea under inhumane conditions, while putting their lives at risk.

Uruguay voted in favour of renewing the provisions of resolution 2040 (2012) by way of today's resolution 2312 (2016), for we are aware of need to address and provide responses to the smuggling of human beings by criminal organizations that are benefiting from the difficult situation being experienced by thousands of people who are willing to risk their lives by going to sea in search of a better life. For Uruguay, it is essentiala that the work of EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia continue in full concordance with international humanitarian law and while taking into consideratiton the extreme vulnerability of the refugees and migrants who cross the Mediterranean Sea. In that regard, the measures mentioned in the resolution should be implemented in accordance with the purposes of principles of a Charter of the United Nations, as well as international law, international humanitarian law, refugee law and international human rights law.

Allow me to point out one aspect that is extremely important for my country, namely, the non-criminalization of migration. In that connection, we are concerned by the inclusion, in the seventeenth preambular paragraph, of the following reference to illegal migration:

> "the need for effective international action to address both the immediate and long-term aspects of illegal migration and human trafficking towards Europe".

My delegation would like to recall that it is not a crime to migrate, and States should therefore not develop policies that are aimed at criminalizing migrants. Moreover, it is important to point out that implementing resolution 2312 (2016), which we just adopted, does not affect the human rights of migrants and asylum seekers aboard vessels who are subject to the measures set out in the text.

Mr. Pressman (United States of America): I think I can agree with one point made by the representative of Venezuela, which is that this is indeed a human drama, and a tragic one at that. Over 130,000 people have set off from the North African coast to attempt to reach Italy this year alone; more than 3,000 of them did not survive that journey. Just last week, more than 250 people — including children as young as 4 — drowned after their boat sank just 12 miles from the Egyptian shore. It has been reported that last week alone more than 11,000 migrants had to be rescued off the Libyan coast.

Our work today is one part — just one part — of what is needed to save lives. All told, more than 10,000 souls have been lost at sea since 2014 after travelling untold miles to escape conflict and extreme poverty, and migrant smugglers and human traffickers have exploited a desperate situation. To stop these smugglers and stem such senseless deaths at sea, the member States of the European Union (EU), coordinating with Libya's Government of National Accord, took action last year through the EU Naval Forces Mediterranean Operation Sophia. Since last October, the Operation has assisted in saving over 37,000 people. For that reason, the United States fully supports renewing resolution 2240 (2016) to extend the Council's support for the EU Operation.

We are pleased that the EU has decided to expand its Operation's mandate to assist in the training of Libyan coast guard and navy. The United States is likewise providing capacity-building assistance to the new Libyan Government, and urges the international community to fully support Libya's Prime Minister Serraj, its Presidency Council and civil society efforts, which are helping Libyans establish a democratic, representative political system, strengthen the capacity of critical Libyan institutions to deliver services, secure Libya's territory and build effective, civilian-led national security institutions.

We must also address the abuses facing refugees and other migrants, lest efforts to shut down people-smuggling have the unintended consequence of trapping those seeking asylum, with no options to flee violence and conflict. We urge the EU and the Government of National Accord to ensure that the human rights and fundamental freedoms of those migrants who are rescued are respected, in accordance with applicable international law. We must also continue to work to end the root causes of this crisis — the conflicts and extreme poverty that drive people from their homes to attempt the very dangerous journey across the Mediterranean.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France welcomes the adoption of resolution 2312 (2016), which extends for 12 months the mandate on which the EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia is based, to fight against migrants on the high seas off the coast of Libya. I thank the British penholder for the very effective work done on this issue. Throughout the negotiations, the resolution enjoyed the full support of the European Union members of the Security Council.

Every day more men and women, often accompanied by children, risk their lives attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea in the hands of smugglers who cynically exploit their distress. The European Union EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia has saved more than 25,000 individuals since the beginning of the year. These are all lives that were saved. This is only part of the response to the overall crisis of migrants, but it remains useful and necessary nonetheless. The effectiveness of the EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia is based to a large extent on the mandate provided by the Council, which allows it to have at its disposal the necessary resources to effectively combat the trafficking in migrants. It strives to do so in the framework of more general cooperation with the Government of National Accord, led by Prime Minister Serraj, which will soon involve the training of Libyan coast guards by the European Union.

As was the case with resolution 2240 (2015), this new text precisely defines the conditions under which the use of force is allowed in facing up to traffickers and smugglers. It also includes robust guarantees for the protection of the rights of migrants and refugees aboard the ships in question. Nothing has changed on that decisive point, and therefore our demands remain the same.

France considers it crucial that the United Nations continue to mobilize to come up with a comprehensive solution to the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean and the tragic situations it leads to. This text, in our view, is part of the answer. Our belief is that the Council cannot remain on the sidelines in silence in the tragic context of the situation in the Mediterranean right now.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Libya.

Mr. Elmajerbi (Libya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of Security Council for this month. We are fully confident in your ability to conduct the work of the Council successfully and skilfully. Let me thank the Permanent Representative of New Zealand for his successful presidency of the Council last month. Allow me also to thank the delegation of the United Kingdom for its valuable efforts to achieve agreement on resolution 2312 (2016), which was just adopted.

The phenomenon of immigration is an old one. Throughout history, it has been characteristic of the development of humankind as people have sought better lives of dignity and security. However, the world today is experiencing an unprecedented phenomenon as waves of people are migrating, and the issue has become a priority of our contemporary world.

The Mediterranean region is no exception when it comes to this phenomenon — for a number of reasons, including instability, strife, conflict, the spread of terrorism, deteriorating economic and development prospects, increasing poverty and worsening climactic conditions. My country is at the very centre of that wave. Our geographic location has made Libya a crossing point from which thousands of people from the African continent, and elsewhere, traverse the Mediterrranean Sea to reach Europe. They risk their lives in the hope of escaping the insecurity and extreme poverty in their countries, only to drown in the Mediterranean.

This is an unprecedented human tragedy, one in which migrants have fallen victim repeatedly. They are either victims of the conditions that force them to emigrate and risk their lives, or of the gangs that traffic and exploit people and take advantage of the weakness of Libya's security institutions that is the result of political division. We therefore stress the importance of cooperating with Libya's security institutions, especially our coast guard, which has been able to save hundreds of migrants despite its limited means.

We greatly appreciate the readiness the European Union has demonstrated to lessen the dangers to migrants on the Mediterranean and save thousands of lives, including the important role played by its military operation in the Southern Central Mediterranean. However, as we stated here in the Council when resolution 2240 (2015) was adopted (see S/PV.7531), we continue to believe that the phenomenon of illegal migration cannot be dealt with by security means alone, including the proposal made by a senior official from a European Union member State to build a migrant city in Libya, which would be a violation of Libya's sovereignty. Other proposals, such as abrogating laws on residency and migration, cannot resolve the issue either, as they would only evade the root causes.

A comprehensive approach to address the issue must focus on the situation in source countries by providing assistance with a view to promoting and strengthening conflict resolution mechanisms and improving their ability to fight terrorism. Furthermore, such an approach must establish an agreement between the United Nations and source, transit and destination countries for developed countries to support development projects in source countries, within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

While we truly appreciate the efforts of the European Union to save the lives of thousands of illegal migrants as they cross the Mediterranean, national and regional efforts have yet to lead to any improvement in the situation, as stated in the report of the Secretary-General. Therefore, we require a long-term strategy in which the European Union would have a major role in addressing the root causes of illegal migration. In tandem, it is imperative that we develop short-term actions to save the lives of thousands of illegal migrants, including through ongoing consultation with the States concerned, in particular Libya, as well as the African Union and the League of Arab States.

In conclusion, I do not think that anyone would object to any international efforts — in keeping with the principles of international law, particularly respecting the sovereignty of all States and non-interference in their internal affairs — aimed at avoiding the loss of more lives in the Mediterranean and putting an end to this humanitarian crisis.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7784

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7784th meeting
Thursday, 6 October 2016, 3.35 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Iliichev	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	China	Mr. Xu Zhongsheng
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Taula
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	Ukraine	Mr. Fesko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Wilson
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in Mali

Letter dated 27 September 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2016/813)

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2016/819)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda is adopted.

The situation in Mali

Letter dated 27 September 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2016/813)

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali (S/2016/819)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Mali to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, and Mr. Atul Khare, Under-Secretary-General for Field Support.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item of the agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2016/813, which contains the text of a letter dated 27 September 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, as well as to document S/2016/819, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ladsous.

Mr. Ladsous (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for your invitation to brief the Security Council along with my colleague and friend Under-Secretary-General Atul Khare, on the overall developments in the situation in Mali. I take this opportunity to welcome the new Permanent Representative of Mali, Mr. Issa Konfourou.

After four months of calm, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was once again the target of a series of coordinated attacks on 3 October. Although the relative calm in recent months might have given us some hope that there could possibly be improvement in the situation on the ground, unfortunately we need to realize that the persistent delays we have seen in the implementation of the Peace Agreement and the latest violations of the ceasefire are incompatible with lasting stabilization, even if that were temporary.

At the meeting of the Security Council on Mali in June (see S/PV.7727), Foreign Minister Diop announced the agreement of the parties on the modalities for the appointment of interim authorities and the timing for establishing them in the five northern regions of Mali during the June-September period, as well as the establishment of security arrangements, including the structures for the Operational Coordination Mechanism. In that context, the Council adopted resolution 2295 (2016) to call upon the parties to accelerate the implementation of the Agreement, notably by agreeing, inter alia, to prioritize certain provisions.

Unfortunately, three months, later I am compelled to report to the Council that, since July, clashes have resumed among signatory groups in the Kidal region, thereby seriously threatening the peace process and postponing once again the appointment of the interim administration. Those institutional and security arrangements should have been in place for nearly a year, and the joint patrols should have been launched in November 2015. I also deplore the lack of progress regarding the process of cantonment and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

The situation in the centre of the country has become worse. On 29 May, in Sévaré in the Mopti region, an improvised explosive device — if such devices really are improvised — was exploded during a convoy of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), killing five Blue Helmets returning from a civilian-protection operation in Ténenkou Cercle. On 18 July, a column of 18 vehicles and several motorcycles attacked installations of Malian armed forces in Nampala in the Ségou region, killing 15 and wounding 34 people. On 2 September, armed individuals briefly occupied the locality of Boni again in the Mopti region.

In that context, it is very important that the Government of Mali, with United Nations support, continue its efforts to prepare a national counter-terrorism strategy that is multifaceted and coherent and includes comprehensive measures to prevent violent extremism. This is necessary because repeated attacks against the authority of the State are taking place against the background of general degradation in the rule of law and social cohesion. In the region of Mopti

alone, intercommunity violence led to 18 deaths and 44 wounded in June, as well as 6 dead and 9 wounded in the period from late August to early September. In that regard, we must welcome the announcement by President Keita, during the ministerial meeting on the sidelines of the General Assembly on 23 September, that a conference of national accord would be held later this year, which could be an important step in strengthening cohesion and national reconciliation to find a long-term, as inclusive as possible, solution to the deep-rooted causes of the crisis in northern Mali.

In the past three months since the adoption of resolution 2295 (2016), MINUSMA has spared no effort to proactively adjust to its new mandate. The fact that Malian stakeholders resort to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Annadif's good offices even on issues with indirect links to the Peace Agreement — such as when he facilitated discussions between opposition parties and the Government on the draft revised electoral law — demonstrates the level of trust that Mr. Annadif has been able to establish in the nine months he has been in office. While there is a high level of trust with the parties, unfortunately it must be said that the parties to the Peace Agreement are yet to leave aside their differences — for example, on Kidal and other issues — and to sit down with our colleague to prioritize implementation steps in order to finalize benchmarks and concrete timelines, as requested in the resolution.

With regard to additional capabilities, they have not yet been generated. The force has utilized the tools at its disposal to the fullest extent in order to project a more robust and proactive posture to protect civilians. Following the clashes in July in Kidal, the Mission launched an operation to deter clashes and protect civilians by showing a robust presence with patrols and checkpoints. It was therefore a very active posture. In August, the Mission launched another operation, again establishing checkpoints and conducting coordinated patrols with the Malian armed forces along the Timbuktu-Douentza-Hombori access from Timbuktu to the Mopti region. Furthermore, in spite of the Mission doing its utmost, civilians continue to suffer from the consequences of military operations by both the armed groups and the Government.

New violations of the ceasefire have further hampered access for humanitarian actors, who are doing their best to answer the most pressing needs of the population, pending the resumption of basic public services by the State. I also regret to note that there have been serious allegations of human rights violations, notably by the Groupe d'autodefense des Touaregs imghad et leurs alliés in the Kidal region, and we also continue to receive reports of the excessive use of force by the Malian army in the centre of the country.

Pursuant to resolution 2295 (2016), MINUSMA has developed a plan to support the redeployment of the Malian armed forces, which is fully in line with the human rights due diligence policy of the Organization. While the state of play of the peace process currently precludes the return of the Malian army to the north part of the country, the Mission has already taken concrete steps to support them in the centre of the country, for example, by upgrading protection for the armed forces at its base in Nampala and by deploying troops with air support to aid them in reasserting control over Boni.

Meanwhile, in parallel, MINUSMA continues to seek to enhance collaboration with Mali's neighbours and to support a regional security initiative to more effectively address all the common security challenges. It is in that context that Special Representative of the Secretary-General Annadif has been engaging the Governments of the Group of Five Sahel Member States, while the Mission is currently planning the deployment of liaison officers as stipulated in the resolution.

The participants in the ministerial meeting of 23 September unanimously stressed that the primary responsibility for the success of the peace process in Mali lies with the parties. MINUSMA will not be able to fully implement its mandate as long as the signatories to the Peace Agreement do not resolutely engage in its implementation. The time has come — it is certainly time — to rise above those immediate localized interests and to think of the long-term expectations of the constituents directly affected, as well as the needs of the country as a whole. As tragically illustrated by the attacks on Monday, the Mission's capacity to protect civilians and counter asymmetric attacks in active defence of its mandate has further been hampered by the absence of the capabilities recommended by the Secretary-General in his report issued in June, which the Council authorized in resolution 2295 (2016).

In that context, I regret to have to inform the Security Council that MINUSMA, instead of receiving reinforcements, will soon be facing the loss of key enablers. For example, two troop-contributing countries have recently apprised us of their decision to withdraw

three of the Mission's five helicopter units by early 2017.

I can assure the Council that we will make every effort to generate assets to replace them. We take every opportunity to work towards that goal, including at the London peacekeeping defence ministerial held a few weeks ago and at the ministerial meeting on Mali held here on 23 September. I attended a meeting in Europe, in Slovakia, last week, and I have also spoken to all interlocutors. But the reality is that no Member State has so far committed to filling in the gaps in our capabilities or to provide us with the capacities that have been authorized by resolution 2295 (2016) and previous resolutions.

Indeed, there is a glaring lack of volunteers. I deeply regret the sombre tone of my presentation today, but I would be remiss if I did not draw the attention of the Council to the persistent absence of concrete progress in the implementation of the peace agreement and the deterioration of the security situation, 18 months after the signing of the Algiers Accord. The situation poses serious questions as to the sustainability and the very relevance of the overall framework for peace and stability in Mali, a framework that the Malian parties have agreed to and that Mali's international partners have committed to supporting.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Ladsous for his briefing.

I give the floor to Mr. Khare.

Mr. Khare: I am honoured to be here today alongside my colleague and friend, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Ladsous.

Mali remains one of the most difficult environments known to United Nations peacekeeping. The size of the country, the remote and landlocked areas where we are deployed, and the poor and insecure road networks continue to pose significant challenges.

Currently we are focused on implementing measures to ensure secure and uninterrupted supply routes; upgrade and strengthen the defence and infrastructure of all existing camps; and improve the capabilities of the the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

MINUSMA is establishing its main logistics hub in Gao to better serve the locations in northern Mali. Discussions with Algeria, Benin and the Niger continue so as to establish additional and much shorter supply routes to Gao. The route from the port of Cotonou through Niamey to Gao, for example, would be more than 1,400 kilometres shorter than MINUSMA's current supply route.

In response to the significant security threat in Mali, MINUSMA continues to upgrade and strengthen the defence infrastructure of all existing camps, including by reinforcing its facilities against blasts and installing protected command positions and bunkers. In high-risk areas, the Mission has also improved living conditions for civilian and uniformed personnel.

We continue to innovate with the use of modern technology, particularly to improve our situational awareness and strengthen the security of our own personnel and assets as well as our capacity to protect civilians. MINUSMA has implemented several pilot projects using surveillance and early-warning technology to improve the intelligence-gathering capacity of the Mission so as to prevent attacks.

In order for MINUSMA to be able to implement its mandate, it is critical that the Mission be provided with the necessary capacities and capabilities required to operate safely and effectively in the current environment, which I have just described.

Since its inception, MINUSMA has experienced significant contingent-owned equipment capability gaps, particularly with the rehatted formed units from the African Union. Shortages of major equipment such as armoured personnel carriers, support vehicles, generators, water-treatment plants and other critical logistics equipment have affected the ability of military and police components to perform operational tasks. The self-sustainment services of the contingents, especially in the medical, observation and communication categories, among others, have not always been provided up to the established standards.

Thanks to the corrective actions taken by the concerned troop-contributing countries (TCCs) and police-contributing countries this year to deploy the needed contingent-owned equipment vehicles and other items so as to meet their obligations and improve equipment serviceability, the overall contingent-owned equipment capability of contingents in MINUSMA has improved, but key gaps remain.

Given the increasingly insecure and violent environment outlined by Under-Secretary-General

Ladsous, efforts are being made to strengthen the Mission medical support plan, equipment and personnel gaps identified in the Mission's medical facilities. MINUSMA's vast area of operations and the austere environment present unique challenges with regard to the implementation of our 10-1-2 emergency medical response timeline for CASEVAC. To address critical gaps in TCC capabilities in this area, the Mission recently acquired, through a commercial solicitation process, two medical evacuation helicopters equipped with the latest in night-vision technology, along with fully integrated medical teams. One is already operational, deployed to Timbuktu, and the second will be deployed shortly to Kidal.

In addition, in order to effectively address the first 10 minutes from the onset of injury or illness, the training of MINUSMA troops and medical personnel is ongoing. We are also working on the development of United Nations-specific first-aid training material, which will be delivered to all Member States as a United Nations medical standard to be incorporated into predeployment troop-training material, so as to streamline the quality of first aid.

Modern peacekeeping operations such as MINUSMA demand a range of new or stronger capabilities, and they demand innovative solutions. We continue to call on Member States to consider becoming what I would refer to as "contingent-owned-equipment-contributing countries". We also call on them to consider contributing to joint battalions, and/or partnering directly with troop- and police-contributing countries to provide the required equipment.

One example of an innovative approach to ensuring the required capabilities is the recent collaboration between Norway, Belgium, Denmark, Portugal and Sweden, which have jointly agreed to provide a C-130 aviation unit to MINUSMA through a mutually agreed multinational rotation concept. This will guarantee the continuous provision of this critical air asset to MINUSMA for a period of approximately two years. The Department of Field Support (DFS) is open to exploring similar arrangements for other equipment in Mali.

It is essential that we uphold the highest standards as we serve and protect the local population. In Mali, environmental management remains a key priority for my Department. Likewise, I continue to prioritize efforts to address sexual exploitation and abuse and all issues related to the conduct of United Nations personnel. I call on all Member States to ensure that our personnel upholds the highest standards of conduct and discipline, ensuring adequate training, the timely reporting of incidents and follow-up action when necessary, so as to ensure accountability.

Looking ahead, neither the challenges nor the risks at hand should be underestimated. A failure to enhance the Mission's capability will have a significant impact on our capacity to deliver on the mandate. However, the results achieved by MINUSMA thus far suggest that with commitment, vision and the continued support of the Council, these challenges are not insurmountable.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. Khare for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the member of the Council who wisheds to make a statent.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to begin by thanking Under-Secretaries-General Hervé Ladsous and Atul Khare for their respective briefings this afternoon.

I would like to highlight the holding, on 23 September, of a high-level meeting on the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, which was a good opportunity for exchanging various points of view on the situation in the country. The situation in Mali continues to be a source of concern, in particular with regard to the levels of violence affecting the civilian population. In the past few months, terrorist attacks and successive violations of the ceasefire have been attributed to the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and the Platform and the absence of State authority in most of the country.

Some of those conditions were assessed by the Security Council mission that ook place in March as part of visits and interviews in Mali. In the light of this sensitive situation, in June, the Security Council adopted resolution 2295 (2016), which grants the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) increased military and police contingents and a considerably more robust mandate than its previous one. It includes active defence and prevention capabilities and the ability to combat asymmetric threats, among other provisions.

Although Uruguay believes that the current MINUSMA mandate goes beyond what is usually expected in a peacekeeping operation by including

counter-terrorism activities, my delegation voted in favour of it, with the understanding that Mali's security situation is an extraordinary one. Three months after adopting resolution 2295 (2016), the situation in Mali remains critical and the security situation on the ground shows no signs of improving — on the contrary.

We believe that the activities conducted thanks to financing from the Peacebuilding fund are relevant and have made it possible to achieve results on the socioeconomic front conducive to capacity-building. As indicated by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2016/819), such activities made it possible for 3,856 Malian children to attend school, 650 income-generating activities for internally displaced persons, refugees and persons returning home to be created and 460 women affected by gender violence to have improved access to justice and security. Thanks to those types of activities, Mali will have an opportunity to build capacity that transcends the presence of the United Nations on the ground.

Uruguay is aware of the challenges being faced by the Government of Mali, particularly in the areas of security and the economy, but it should tackle that problem with a long-term approach, by addressing the root causes of the problem, giving signs of credibility to the parties to the Peace Agreement and avoiding the spread of terrorism in the country. The regional initiatives to combat terrorism, as the Group of Five for the Sahel, are crucial in addressing the problem of terrorism affecting Mali and various countries in the region. We must recall that such terrorist groups disregard borders and, as such, approaching the issue from a solely national perspective would be simplistic. Therefore, we urge the Government of Mali and the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad and the Platform to keep dialogue open in order to implement the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, in the conviction that if these are not achieved, new flanks facilitating terrorist activities will emerge and it will be increasingly difficult to re-establish the State's authority throughout the country.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to the representative of Mali.

Mr. Konfourou (Mali) (*spoke in French*): As this is the first time that I take the floor at the Security Council since assuming my duties as Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mali, I am delighted to convey cordial greetings and profound gratitude from the Government and the people of Mali for the special attention paid to Mali by the Council. I am committed to working closely with the members of the Council to achieve peace and stability in Mali and beyond.

I would like to warmly congratulate you, Sir, on behalf of the delegation of Mali, on the accession of your great country, the Russian Federation, to the presidency of the Security Council for October. I sincerely thank the delegation of New Zealand for the commendable work done during its presidency of the Council over the past month. I must also pay tribute to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his deep and unwavering commitment to peace, security and to the well-being of people throughout the world and, in particular, in my county, Mali. I would also like to thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Minister Mahamat Saleh Annadif, the United Nations system and all of our other partners for their ceaseless efforts to promote peace and stability in Mali. On behalf of the President of the Republic of Mali, His Excellency Mr. Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, I would like to commend the members of the Council today on reaching consensus in selecting Prime Minister António Guterres as the next Secretary-General of the United Nations.

I would like to reiterate the appreciation of the Government and people of Mali to the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, the Chair of the Follow-Up Committee on the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, France, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, the Niger, Chad, the United States of America, Russia, the United Kingdom and China for their commitment to restoring peace and stability in our country.

The delegation of Mali takes note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2016/819) and commends Under-Secretaries-General Hervé Ladsous and Atul Khare for their briefings. The report is focused on the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and reconciliation in Mali and on action taken by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). We commend the fact that the current report refers to the progress made in the implementation of the Agreement and acknowledges the efforts made by the Government of Mali, led by President Keita as the Head of State.

With regard to security, the delegation of Mali is concerned about the inter- and intra-community tension in regions in the north of the country, including Kidal. We share the analysis of the Secretary-General that the situation in the centre and north of the country remains of concern given the persistence of asymmetric attacks perpetrated by extremist and terrorist groups against Mali's defence and security forces and international forces. Such factors are the main obstacles to the implementation of the Peace Agreement.

Like the Secretary-General, the Government of Mali is concerned about the human rights situation in the country. However, the excessive use of force, of which the security and defence forces of Mali have been accused in their fight against terrorism, appears to be exaggerated. It does not take into account the efforts undertaken by the Government of Mali in order to promote and protect human rights in a very difficult environment, marked by the lack of State authority in certain parts of the country. Be that as it may, I can assure the Council that investigations are under way and proceedings have been opened by the Ministry of Justice in Mali. I would also like to assure the Council that the Government of Mali remains fully committed to promoting and protecting human rights.

You will recall, Sir, that on 16 June, following a similar exercise, the Prime Minister of Mali informed the Security Council about actions and initiatives undertaken by the Government of Mali within the framework of the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconcilation in Mali. Convinced that speeding up its implementation is the only viable political and strategic option in the current situation faced by my country, the Government has spared no effort to continue along that path.

More recently, during the high-level ministerial meeting devoted to the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, which was co-chaired with the Secretary-General on 23 September here in New York, the Head of State of Mali recalled the major progress that had been achieved. Also, to express his personal involvement and his desire to expedite the process, the President of the Republic informed us of his appointment of a High Representative responsible for follow-up to the implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. He also stressed that a total cessation of hostilities between the defence and security forces of Mali and armed groups had taken place since the signing of the Agreement in May/June 2015. Trust is therefore being restored among Malian parties.

With regard to political and institutional reforms, the Government of Mali has carried out a review of the code on local collectivities, the adoption of a new electoral law and the appointment of governors of new regions, as well as the setting up of a working group to review the Constitution with a view to looking at a number of relevant provisions of the Peace Agreement.

On the development front, the Government of Mali has adopted an emergency reconstruction plan for the interim period, which covers 2016-2017, and is continuing to develop specific development strategy for the northern regions of Mali and one for a financial architecture of a sustainable development fund for the north. The fund will include almost €457 million for the period 2016-2018, which is considered to be our Government's contribution to the peace effort. We will also establish of a number of regional development agencies.

In addition to these measures, the President has announced the convening of the national reconciliation conference before the end of the current year. This will be in keeping with the relevant provisions of the Agreement and its article 5, which calls for the establishment of the necessary conditions for an in-depth debate among all the components of our nation regarding the deep-rooted causes of the conflict. The objective is to come up with a charter for peace, unity and national reconciliation. Similarly, the Government has decided that we will hold communal local elections before the end of 2016.

In keeping with this momentum, the Head of State has held a number of meetings and discussions with the key political and social players in our country. The President has received the leader of the opposition and several other political, religious and traditional leaders to hear their concerns. The overall situation of the country, particularly in the centre and the north, lay at the very heart of these exchanges.

With regard to the situation in Kidal, one marked by inter- and intra-community clashes, which are of concern to the national authorities at the very highest level, I would like to underscore that the Government of the Republic Mali is in no way linked to these tensions and local rivalries. The Government has no interest in backing one camp against any other. Given the loss of life and the consequences of these tensions on the whole

peace process, the High Representative of the President to follow-up on the implementation of Peace Agreement has organized a series of meetings in Bamako between the signatory movements, with the participation of international members of the Follow-up Committee. The President will continue to work with the leaders of the different movements and traditional leaders in the region to contribute to the return of peace, which is necessary for trust among the different parties.

Similarly, the Government has given pride of place to the same approach comprising dialogue and the search for peaceful solutions in the face of the deteriorating security situation in the centre of the country. The Head of State has called upon traditional mechanisms for resolving inter-communal tensions by contacting political, religious and traditional leaders to reduce tensions in the Mopti region. He has also called to avoid any confusion in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. The Government had worked to finalize a comprehensive action plan to secure, stabilize and strengthen social cohesion aimed at coming up with a multifaceted response to the situation in the central parts of my country.

As can be noted, the Government of Mali, under the authority of the President Keita, has as its only priority the welfare of the Malian people, a well-being which requires peace and reconciliation, which lies at the very heart of our country. That is why he has committed himself in a resolved way and in good faith to a full-fledged implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. However, we will not be able to achieve this alone. The other Malian parties must fully play their role in that exercise. They will have to break with all terrorist movements and organized crime, and commit themselves in good faith to peace.

I would like to underscore the necessity of accelerating the process of cantonment and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration in order to isolate those armed groups that have not signed the Peace Agreement that are affiliated with terrorist networks, whose presence in the northern regions is undermining efforts under way there.

Also, to put an end to the untold suffering inflicted upon innocent people, the Government again calls for the adoption of targeted sanctions against all those who impede the implementation of the Peace Agreement, in keeping with the relevant provisions of article 54 and the declaration of the international mediation team during the eleventh meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee. The international community also has a great responsibility as guarantor of the implementation of the Peace Agreement. We would like to renew our call upon friendly States and partner organizations to make more concrete the commitments undertaken during successive conferences on the development of Mali to enable us to ensure the effective implementation of the Agreement.

It is also the responsibility of the Security Council, pursuant to resolution 2295 (2016) — and we welcome its adoption — to help the Government of Mali to progressively restore the authority of the State throughout the national territory, a precondition for ending the abuse and lawlessness in a number of areas of Mali. To do this, MINUSMA, as now authorized by resolution 2295 (2016), must adopt a more proactive and robust posture. It is therefore important, even urgent, that MINUSMA be fully equipped and provided with the necessary means and resources to appropriately discharge its mandate, which is to stabilize Mali. On its part, the Government of Mali will fully play its role within the framework of the new mandate, and is already working closely with MINUSMA to very rapidly achieve a common vision regarding its implementation through the development of quantifiable benchmarks.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the gratitude of the Government and the people of Mali to the Secretary-General, his Special Representative in Mali and to all the troop-contributing countries for all the sacrifices that they have made for a final and lasting settlement to the Malian crisis. I pay tribute to all victims of this crisis, civilians and military, foreign and Malian. I also welcome the outstanding work carried out by the women and men of MINUSMA, as well as the Barkhane Force for the stabilization of Mali and the entire Sahel region.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.